Peso plunges to new low of 55.85 to US dollar

Guingona defection plan shocks Palace

By Christine O. Avendaño and Ed Cabacungan Jr.

MALACAÑANG officials are feeling embarrassed themselves "shocked" that Vice President Teofisto...

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INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

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ERC orders Meralco to roll back rates

Household bills to go down 28¢ per kWh

By Raoul W. Dantioquia
Business

FOR A change, Manila Electric Co. has asked the Energy Regulatory Commission to lower the electricity rates it is charging some four million customers in Metro Manila and neighboring provinces.

Meralco Chief Executive Officer Jesus Ma. Arnaldo Vi. Ma. Ma. Ma

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2004

Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

SC reopens cases of 2 death convicts

THE SUPREME Court yesterday re-opened the cases of two convicted kidnappers scheduled to die by lethal injection this week.

Magistrates agreed to hear via videolink the new witnesses presented by chief public defender Persida Rueda-Acosta clearing the two of involvement in the crime they were convicted for.

"There would be a miscarriage of justice if these two are executed," lawyer said, adding that Manila's solicitor general "volunteered to not oppose" last week's request for the case.

Problem: Municipal Acosta earlier rejected appeals from the church and rights groups to stay the executions of Reynaldo Lara and Roderick Licayan on Friday, stressing that the rule of law should be followed. She said the only way to save the two would be for the high court to reverse their penalties.

The high will found "has enough time to act on the matter," prosecutor-general Ignacio Bunyi told reporters. SC spokesperson Midas Marquez added, "They have to make an immediate resolution."

If the Court fails to come up with a decision by Friday, Licayan and Lara will become the first convicts to die by lethal injection since the Municipal lifted a three-year moratorium on the death penalty last month.

The President's move was meant to curb a rash of violent crimes, including kidnapping for ransom, that had angered members of the rich ethnic Chinese community.

Seven convicts were put to death between 1999 and 2000, but those presidents Joseph Estrada declared a moratorium on judicial executions amid protests from the influential Catholic church and rights groups.

DEADLINE NEARS. Protester rallies in front of the Supreme Court for a stay of execution for convicts Roberto Lara and Roderick Licayan.

"Yesterday morning, as the high tribunal prepared to hear Acosta's oral arguments, over 50 members of Socialista and Manunggang Bayan (MCB) held a peaceful rally in front of the SC building, expressing their opposition to the two's scheduled executions and ultimately calling for a repeal of the law that brought back capital punishment.

MTB spokesperson Wilma Sinbuhan said her group was hopeful that the new evidence—given by recently arrested suspects Bobo Ritzenberg and Saul de los Reyes—was strong enough to clear both condemned men of murder. They were in the 1998 kidnapping of a Chinese businessman and his aide.

Ritzenberg and Delos Reyes will be arraigned on Feb. 9.

The petitioners maintained that the death penalty should be abolished altogether. Instead, they said, criminals should be punished to the fullest just as system.

Sinbuhan pointed out that some, if not all, death convicts were poor people "vulnerable to false accusations and wrong convictions." She cited the cases of Lara and Licayan as "illustrations of the weaknesses" in the system.

Sinbuhan president Wilma Fortaleza said the death penalty was ineffective and ran contrary to the country's concept of a justice system that goes custody-oriented to be rehabilitated. He group would reconsider their stand. Fortaleza said, if "crimes and corrupt politicians" and "incorrigible government officials" were scheduled for execution before ordinary criminals.

At the New Bilibid Prisons, almost a thousand death row inmates also attempted to stage a protest later in the day by banging the bars of their cells, according to prison chaplain Roberto Delgado. But the threat of charging in vain cells for a week immediately quelled the cacophony.

MBP Chief Penal Supt. Eric Jo Tenero said he ordered his men to clear down the cells of inmates who refused to listen to their warnings against participating in the latter barrage led by the Coalition Against Death Penalty.

"The atmosphere is misconstrued as it is because of the forthcoming executions," Tenero said of the incidents in an interview in cable-line offices. "I have warned some death penalty advocates not to agitate the prisoners."

"If these advocates are really concerned about the inmates, they should not aggravate the tension," Tenero stressed, recounting an incident in the 1960s when prisoners beheaded a jail guard after a series of toxic barrages. Leila B. Salaverria, Cynthia D. Barbara, and Maryjane Ortiz, *with reports from AP and Agence France-Presse*

Time ticking fast but death convicts still manage to smile

By Marjana Ortiz

TIME is fast ticking away for brothers Lara and Roderick Licayan, but they manage to smile once in a while, and even joke around.

New Bilibid Prisons chaplain Father Robert Dhagnet yesterday said the bishop convicts, now in ordinary confinement, have learned to accept their fate after a month of spiritual counseling.

"Of course, Lara and Licayan also pray that something positive will come out of the new evidence that their lawyers presented to the Supreme Court to stay their execution, but they are prepared to accept any eventuality," Dhagnet said inside his office at the NBP Dna ng dna Penitentiary.

He described Licayan as "the more outgoing and friendly" between the two, always finding reasons to laugh and crack jokes. Lara was more pensive, he said, and remained calm.

When he visited yesterday, Dhagnet recounted, Licayan was talking to other inmates through a small window. In his own cell, Lara just sat quietly in a chair, indeep thought as usual.

"Lara cries easily especially when he talks about his family, and wishes he was the nature he was a child again, during which he was by the police," the priest said. "But he has been smiling a little more lately, and is now easier to engage in light conversation."

He added each man which accompanies just as they do in accordance about their lives, Dhagnet said, grinning. "Lara gently answered Lito Lapid, while Licayan said Isabel Pataña."

Lara's family, including his two children, has been staying at the NBP parish church for the past two weeks to be near him, according to the chaplain. On the other hand, he said, Licayan has not seen his children for six years. "He has been staying in a separate public service program (Wish for Lang!) for help."

Dhagnet said the condemned men have the same regret—not being able to take care of their children, and each one has expressed the same sentiment in the same words: "Because I will not see them grow up."

Congress races to approve rights compensation bill

By Michael Lim Ubac and Carlos Pabio

HOLDING against time, this Senate committee on justice and human rights Saturday voted forward Bill 1377, or the Human Rights Compensation Act, to the plenary for its approval yesterday.

Committee chair Sen. Joker Arroyo urged his colleagues to pass the measure before Congress adjourns on Feb. 6, "to meet the urgency of granting long-delayed compensation to the human rights victims and to comply with the republic's legal obligations arising from human rights laws and treaties."

Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr., co-sponsor of the bill along with Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan and Senators Teofisto Guingona III, also called upon the other senators to support the measure.

"Let's pass it sooner so that at least during their lifetime, those who survived torture and the salvage or families of martial rule will somehow get a recognition for all their sufferings and hardships," he said.

He said, however, that he, along with Senator Arroyo and Vice President Teofisto Guingona, would not seek compensation. "We have nothing to lose," he said, amid cheering from the floor.

Arroyo said the measure would set aside P10 billion of the P681 million confiscated from the family of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, to "correct" the injustices suffered by the victims of martial law.

The bill which was certified as urgent by President Macapagal-Arroyo, limits the claimants to martial law victims by outlining the compensable period between 1972 and 1986.

In his sponsorship speech on the Committee Report No. 406, Arroyo mentioned that 18 years after the ouster of Marcos, the human rights violations committed by his dictatorship—like the plunder perpetrated by his family and cronies—still shock justice."

"This bill proposes to correct that historical injustice."

At the House of Representatives, Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. assured the House was set to approve other new rights or to deny a similar bill awaiting in committee, despite the opposition of some members claiming the Marcos ostracism.

De Venecia made the assertion/statement after convening a caucus to identify priority legislative measures of the administration. Congress goes on recess on Feb. 6.

"We will approve the compensation bill, as well as the pending bill on anti-terrorism," the Speaker told reporters at the session floor. He was referring to House Bill 4535, which seeks to give a P1.9 billion indemnification package to victims of human rights abuse.

Comelec's computer experts defend use of automated counting machines

By Marvin P. Marfil

THE COMMISSION on Elections' team of computer advisers yesterday used the use of automated counting machines, saying they contributed to credible and honest elections.

The group consisted the recent Supreme Court decision voiding the P1.3-billion automated counting machines contract, saying this would have the 2004 elections open to fraud.

"Because of the ruling, the Filipino people will now be forced to entrust their votes to a manual system of counting that had been proven to be prone to massive fraud," the group said in a letter they made public yesterday.

The group, composed of the eight Information Technology professionals who evaluated the specifications and tested the software that would have been used in the automated counting process, presented a "win-win" solution so that the machines would not be wasted.

Group member Antonio Tinio, PCNET-WISE Inc. president, said the solution is to allow telecom companies in Metro Manila and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

"This will give the Comelec an avenue to enable it to initiate full automation [in the future]," Tinio said.

The remarks were contained in a 17-page memorandum addressed to Comelec Chief Justice Jamie Abalos, whose office had earlier asked the group to comment on the Supreme Court decision.

Aside from the letter, the group held separate conferences yesterday at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) in Makati City.

The eight, aside from Tinio, are Information Technology Foundation of the Philippines officers Helen Grilo and Elena Mae Tuason, former ITEP director Carlos Manuel, Information Systems Security Society of the Philippines director officers Bel and Lance Jr., ISSSP secretary/treasurer chair Ms. Leonora Pedero, La Salle assistant professor Allan Borra, and former University of the Philippines Computer Center programmer Romero Mercurio.

During the press conference, the group maintained they did not wish to defend the Comelec or defend the Supreme Court, but have by emphasis "concerns" aired by the high tribunal regarding the software for the automated counting and canvassing project.

According to the group, the court's decision seemed to convey the message that the ACMs might not work.

"The extended discourse...which bears no direct relation to the issues raised in the petition filed by the ITPP—is of specific concern to IT professionals because it supports opinion the persistent allegation by the Comelec software development team which was following processes and procedures well accepted by the IT industry," the group said.

According to the team, the high court had focused on the alleged failure of the Comelec to address the shortcomings of the software, including the "failing marks" given in the program.

SAINT DOES IT, CARDINAL! Retired Manila archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin, second from right, prays as aides from Bishop Antonio Tobias, left, during the latter's installation Monday as the new head of the Novaliches diocese. He replaced Bishop Teodoro Bacani, who resigned last year after being accused of sexual harassment by a church secretary. Bacani has since been cleared of the charges by the Vatican.

2,000 names stricken off Marcos victims' list—Swift

By Dona Z. Pazzibugan

ABOUT 2,000 names were struck off the list of 9,539 martial law victims who were awarded $2 billion in damages by a US court in 1995.

Robert Swift, lead counsel of the class suit, said the invalidated claims mostly belonged to human rights group Selda.

Selda, which initiated the class suit in 1986, has a long standing rift with Swift.

"We had some difficulty with claims submitted by Selda. A number of claims they submitted were suspicious," Swift said in a news conference last week.

He said he asked US District court judge Manuel Real to "validate" the claims in 1995, following the $13.5-million compromise deal with the Marcoses.

Swift's group, Claimants' 5000, agreed to settle for $133-million.

But Selda opposed this, stating the deal would absolve the Marcoses of liability.

"Those are people who did not submit their claims before the cutoff time around, or whose claims may have been deemed invalid for various reasons," he added.

Implement set in a quandary how to go about implementing terms of martial law out of the recovered $684 million Marcos ill-gotten wealth.

The Presidential Commission on Good Government wants Congress to enact a "much comprehensive" that would validate the claims and determine the amount of compensation.

GOTCHA: Reynaldo Cacho, kidnap-for-ransom suspect, arrives at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport from Tacloban escorted by PNP-Pacer and PNP-Aviation staff. He was presented to the President and media at Camp Crame yesterday.

NO. 8 MOST WANTED

Kidnap suspect had so much money he didn't know what to do

By Christian V Esguerra

HE HAD so much money and didn't know what to do.

So Reynaldo Cacho, the country's eighth most wanted kidnap suspect, and his common-law wife Marina Mota, went on a spending spree. Still with money to spare, he treated his neighbors in Barangay Bo. Obrero to nights of drinking.

It wasn't long before news of his unexplained wealth—his share from a recent kidnapping spree was...reached the police. Last Saturday, at 8 a.m., a special operations group headed by Chief Supt. Dionisio Coloma Jr., Eastern Visayas police director, stormed Cacho's safe house, three hours from metropolitan Tacloban.

Police learned Cacho's whereabouts from an informant who had ratted the suspect's flamboyant lifestyle.

Yesterday, Cacho was flown to the headquarters of the National Anti-Kidnapping Task Force and was presented to President Macapagal-Arroyo and reporters in a press conference in Camp Crame.

Ms Macapagal lauded the arrest, saying it was an effort dedicated to the "common people."

"We're doing this for the nine dozen who were on the 'rule against criminals, for the 360-others still hounded by ex-PO2 Rolando Sandoval, himself part of the 14 most wanted kidnap suspects, according to budget drone, bloked short.

During interrogation, Cacho admitted that his group was behind the abduction of businesswoman Corazon Yu in June 2003, and the disappearance of 13-year-old Rubelyn Chiu and two months later. Both cases took place in Cotabato City. PNP Provincial Director Senior Supt. Leopoldo Bataoil said Cacho's group was also responsible for the kidnapping of Ozamiz City businessman Jose Marie Chan in 2000.

Cacho, who had a P500,000 price tag for his arrest, is a member of the Kidlat Command, a group headed by ex-PO2 Rolando Sandoval, part of the 14 most wanted kidnap suspects, according to budget drone, bloked short.

During interrogation, Cacho admitted that his group was behind the abduction of businesswoman Corazon Yu in June 2003, and the disappearance of 13-year-old Rubelyn Chiu and two months later. Both cases took place in Cotabato City. PNP Provincial Director Senior Supt. Leopoldo Bataoil said Cacho's group was also responsible for the kidnapping of Ozamiz City businessman Jose Marie Chan in 2000.

ANOTHER ONE DOWN: President Macapagal-Arroyo rubs off mug shot of Reynaldo Cacho, who was once the eighth most-wanted kidnap suspect.

Comelec asks GMA-7 to explain 'Bio-Data'

By TJ Burgonio

ELECTION chief Benjamin Abalos has asked GMA-7 to explain its airing of "Bio Data," a special show which features presidential candidates, their background and accomplishments.

Abalos said that while it was informative, the show falls under premature electioneering, since it promotes candidates before the start of the official campaign period which starts on Feb. 10.

"They argued that they're doing it for the public. Yes, that's true, but there would be a time for that. Let's be consistent that within the 90 days (campaign period). Not now," Abalos said in a press forum at the Manila Hotel.

The hour-long "Bio Data," which airs after the 10pm evening news every Tuesday, has featured opposition Sen. Panfilo "Ping" Lacson, former education secretary Raul Roco and incumbent Sen. Ma Villanueva of the Areza is Lito Osmeña.

John Mendoza, production unit manager of the show, said the GMA management had met with the Comelec to discuss the show but it does not see plans to stop airing the show "for the time."

Also at the forum was opposition senatorial candidate Francisco Tatad who reminded the Comelec about the continued hosting of the radio program, "May Gloria Ka Bayan" by President Macapagal-Arroyo, who is seeking a full term, and her running mate, Sen. Noli de Castro. He observed: "While broadcaster candidates are required by law to resign or go on leave as broadcasters at the beginning of the campaign period, Mrs. Arroyo and Senator De Castro have apparently decided to reserve the law by launching their own broadcast show and at government expense."

Tatad, who is eyeing a comeback as the former senator presidential candidate Fernando Poe's frontrunner in Magkaisang Pilipino, pointed out that there was a "conflict of interest" between De Castro's role as a senator and job as a TV journalist.

'NO. 1 FAN'

Gloria dedicates 'Cory Room'

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

AQUINO

FORMER President Corazon Aquino announced early enough that she would not endorse any presidential candidate in the coming polls. Even so, President Macapagal-Arroyo has made sure that Aquino would remain her best pal in war.

Ms Macapagal yesterday dedicated a room on the second floor of Malacañang's Kalayaan Hall annex to the country's first woman Chief Executive, calling it "President Corazon Aquino Room." She also hoisted a festive, day luncheon for Aquino, who turned 71 on Sunday. Earlier, she gave a birthday cake to Aquino's home in Quezon City, on which was written in decorative confection: "From your No. 1 fan."

In her brief remarks during the dedication of what used to be her office, Aquino gave a bittersweet message to the Palace's current and future occupants: "I think the rooms I chose (to work later) as consul of in Malacañang (main palace) was that I know I was just a guest. I would not be here forever, my role was very temporary."

But she thanked her host, saying she was happy and honored. "I have many beautiful memories, not only of this office but of the entire Premier Guest House."

In 1986, Aquino led the People Power Revolt, or Edsa 1, which was triggered by the assassination of her husband, Sen. Benigno Aquino Jr. and which resulted in the ouster of dictator Ferdinand Marcos. She then served as President from 1986 to 1992.

During her term, Aquino stayed at the Malacañang Guesthouse outside the main Malacañang compound, and held office in the Premier Guesthouse. Her successor, President Fidel Ramos, also lived in the Aduopal Guesthouse but held office at the main Palace.

The Premier Guesthouse, which is in the southern end of the complex beside the Pasig River, was hosted as official residence by President Joseph Estrada, who had it lavishly refurbished.

Presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye admitted the accommodation by Aquino would help Mr Macapagal-Arroyo in her bid next May. But he said the President "definitely respects" Aquino's decision "not to engage in partisan politics at this time."

Lawmaker chides Left for 'illusions' on FPJ as champion of the masses

By Carlos Conde

THE LEFT is being "politically naive" when it entertains illusions that actor Fernando Poe Jr. can be a champion of the masses.

Rep. Prospero Pichay (Lakas, Kabarangi) chided the militant Left-bloc groups for expressing disappointment that presidential candidate Poe has chose to meet with business tycoons representing workers, peasants, urban poor and the youth. Poe's agenda is "controlled by some power-hungry politicians and businessmen," he said.

Pichayno, who's also a close friend of reelectionist President Macapagal-Arroyo, said: "The masses should wake up and realize that they do not have a voice in [Poe's] circle of advisers."

"They're not the only ones left out in the cold.

The political heirs of the late labor leader Felimon "Popoy" Lagman, who previously served ties with the mainstream Left, have yet to meet with the populist actor. Rep. Renato Magtubo (Bayan Muna-Magsasaka) said: "We're still waiting... to find out his [Poe's] agenda."

The Partido ng Manggagawa and Kilusan, organizations put up by Lagman, have not disclosed which candidates they will support in the May 10 national elections. Magtubo said: "Our agenda is clear—the welfare of workers and basic sectors representation."

The Left-leaning Bayan Muna party-list group earlier held a national convention and issued resolutions. Poe was a no show.

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FACTS ABOUT BIRD FLU

A VENDOR weighs his dressed chicken inside a public market in Manila. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

NOW is a look at the *bird flu* spreading through Asia:

What is it: A form of influenza believed to strike all birds, though domestic poultry are believed especially prone to it. It also has jumped to humans, though its human-to-human transmission has been reported.

Where is it: Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Laos and Pakistan have reported outbreaks in birds in recent weeks. Thailand and Vietnam have reported human cases. Bird flu was first reported in humans in Hong Kong in 1997. Since then, it's popped up mostly in Asia, although the Netherlands reported an outbreak, including human cases, in 2003.

How many people affected: The disease has killed seven people. Vietnam has confirmed 43 human cases, all of whom have died. Thailand has confirmed three cases, including one death.

How it's passed: Infected birds spread the virus through saliva, feces and nasal secretions. So far, only humans with direct contact with sick birds have caught the disease. But scientists are worried that bird flu could link with regular human influenza, mutate, and become a deadly new virus and trigger a pandemic.

Symptoms in birds: Loss of appetite, ruffled feathers, fever, weakness, diarrhea, excessive thirst, crowing. If the strain is severe, mortality rate can range between 50 percent and 100 percent.

Symptoms in humans: Fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, eye infections, pneumonia, acute respiratory distress, viral pneumonia.

Treatment for humans: The World Health Organization says this year's strain is resistant to cheaper anti-viral drugs, amantadine and rimantadine. Scientists are exploring more expensive treatments. The WHO also recommends quarantining sick people.

Good safety: There's no evidence that the virus is being passed through eating chicken products. Health experts say. Heat kills viruses, and the WHO says chicken products should be cooked thoroughly at temperatures of at least 70 degrees Celsius. The WHO also says people should wash their hands after handling poultry and ensure that poultry carcasses do not contaminate other objects. AP

Imported chicken in 19 vans tracked

From page A1

to WHO regional spokesperson Jean Cottingham.

Jean Marc Olivé, WHO representative to the Philippines, said that the danger of a disease turning into a pandemic usually must start with the mutation of the virus that causes it. In the case of the bird flu, the virus from one main could replicate, mutate and adjust to the human environment.

"Humans have no protection against this virus. That is the reason the WHO is monitoring [our] very very closely," Olivé said.

The WHO is setting up a surveillance system in 45 Asian countries to stop the bird flu virus from infecting people in the region.

Mistrust

Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit sought to quell rumors that infected animals had been smuggled into the country, saying that there was "minimal chance" of the bird flu infecting Filipinos.

Dayrit said the bird flu virus could enter the country through the importation of live infected chicken and migratory birds' contact with chickens in the country.

The DOH said the worst scenario in the country would be the mass slaughter of infected chickens, and not the transmission to humans.

Bird flu is caused by 15 subtypes of influenza A virus, which circulate only in birds. Migratory waterfowl are resting in a poultry population for some time. All outbreaks of the highly pathogenic form have been caused by influenza A/H5N1, the only one that causes severe outbreaks in humans.

Olivé said the government should convey poultry supply and "take proper action to get rid of such chickens."

He also said there should be close coordination between the Departments of Health and of Agriculture concerning the entry of all chickens, ducks, quails in the country.

Olivé said the governments in the region should facilitate the dispersal of people who have fled and make sure that this is not caused by the bird flu virus.

"What the WHO is worried about is the possibility of human-to-human transmission. This means persons infected with virus transmits the virus to another person who has no direct contact with an infected animal," Olivé said.

Breaking vans

The Anti-Smuggling Task Force of the Department of Agriculture have that the eight trucks carrying frozen cuts loaded with chicken parts that were intercepted right after the country on Friday, until have been released into the market.

Benjamin Angeles, head of the Anti-Smuggling Task Force, said his team was still trying to locate the remaining container vans.

The director of the National Meat Inspection Commission disclosed that the seized smuggled poultry in Barangay and Mandaluyong City last originally transported from Taiwan as earlier reported.

NMIC Director Silvia Nuestro said that boxes containing the chicken leg quarters have marks showing that they came from US and Canada, not Taiwan. He said the chicken legs in 18 of the 19 refrigerated container vans came from Tyson, a US-based poultry company. The others came from Colombo. The items did not have the country's approval to import the items from the NMIC.

On Saturday, Batangas police intercepted a refrigerated container van containing 23,000 kilos of smuggled chicken leg quarters from US and Canada. Some cans were intercepted in Batangas City, while another one was intercepted in Navotas.

Nuestro identified the consignee as a certain Ben Tesh Ng, which is listed in Northbay, Quezon City. The goods were supposed to have come from the Unit. of 30006 and Canada but were transferred to MV Evergreen in a port in Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

Nuestro said his office had yet to check with its counterparts in the US and Canada to determine whether the chicken indeed came from the two countries. With reports from Tarra Quismundo

Bird flu spreads to 9 Asian countries

From page A1

from the virus.

Six people have died in Vietnam and Thai officials are trying to determine whether bird flu was also the cause of last week's death of a 26-year-old man had been boarding fighting cocks. A 10-year-old girl and a 58-year-old woman have been confirmed as having the disease in addition to a 7-year-old boy diagnosed last week. Two other suspected cases have been reported.

The WHO said a month for cases had been set back because the virus had mutated. A previous strain detected in Hong Kong in 1997 can no longer be used as the key to producing a vaccine. It said an international effort succeeded.

Scientists believe people get the disease through contact with sick birds. Although there has been no evidence yet of human-to-human transmission, health officials are concerned the virus might mutate further and link with regular influenza to create a form that could be transmitted from person to person, triggering the next human flu pandemic.

"This is now spreading too quickly for anybody to ignore it," said WHO spokesperson Peter Cordingley in Manila.

China, the source of disease outbreaks in the past including SARS last year, has reported no bird flu cases. It says it is working hard to stop bird flu from surfacing.

Indonesian officials had earlier denied the disease's presence, but the country's veterinarian association and independent investigation had revealed that bird flu had killed millions of chickens over recent months.

Charges of cover-up

The Jakarta Post reported Monday that Indonesian officials may have covered the outbreak there at the behest of politically connected businessmen who feared it would harm their interests. Indonesian officials denied the allegations.

"It's not true. We have not taken any action for pressure from businessmen. We are talking about the lives of people," agriculture department spokesperson Chet Priyanto said.

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra faced similar allegations that he covered up the outbreak in the country.

Thaksin has said that his government had suspected "a couple of weeks" ago that bird flu had struck its nation but that he didn't tell the public because he feared mass panic.

Thaksin appealed for calm and said that countries affected by the outbreak would meet in Bangkok on Wednesday for talks.

"People should not panic. The disease is not easily caught by humans. Only those who are close to sick chickens are at risk," he said.

Thailand has exterminated about 11 million chickens as its hundreds of soldiers and entire prison inmates have been mobilized to help with the cull after some poultry workers refused to carry out the grisly task for fear of being infected.

The cull has focused on two western provinces of Suphan Buri and Kanchanaburi. But officials said Monday that the virus had been detected in eight more provinces, vastly expanding the infected zone north to the Laos border.

Some measures already imposed in the vast areas hit region, including exhibition space and a transport ban around affected farms, would be extended to the eight provinces, officials said.

The outbreak has devastated Thailand's chicken export industry—the world's fourth largest. Thailand shipped about 500,000 tons of chicken worth $1.3 billion in 2003. Vietnam has slaughtered more than 3 million chickens.

No mass cull yet

Indonesia's agriculture officials said they had no immediate mass cull of chickens would be ordered despite WHO that infected flocks should be killed.

In Laos, a Vientiane-based UN official said thousands of chickens had died but suspected bird flu and he urged the communist government to mass clean about the outbreak to prevent human infections.

"Syed Firdaus, the ministry of agriculture was talking about food workers but now they have to admit it is bird flu," he said.

South Korea also reported a new suspected outbreak of bird flu on Monday, prompting nine-day quarantine efforts with an exclusion zone established around a farm south of Seoul where thousands of chickens died last week. It also banned poultry imports from Thailand.

Japan said Monday it would expand a ban on poultry imports from Indonesia and Cambodia after they reported outbreaks of bird flu in recent days. *Reports from AFP and AFP*

Opposition rivals slam . . .

From page A1

until recently was former majority leader, the second ranking administration senator.

In a bid to strengthen its position that the administration backs the Respondent's claim sans, the ESP also floated the idea of naming former National Archives Director Ricardo Manapat into a "state witness."

Ibid Reyes, head of the ESP's media bureau, told the inquirer yesterday that Poe would not hesitate to shield Manapat from criminal and administrative charges should he decide to talk.

"Why not let's him into a state witness? It is a matter of fact somebody suggested that as we, I would know who are the actual brains," said Reyes, who served as press secretary during the Ramos and Estrada administrations.

But Reyes did not explain what kind of protection should Poe, who does not hold any government position, could offer Manapat.

Capability

At a news conference in the Senate, Legarda said Romero and the one behind the smear campaign was the one with the capability to pull it off.

"Who can access recent ads worth P1,250,000 a page? Who would benefit from this?" Romero said, referring to the ads that came out in several newspapers, including the Inquirer, that purported to show that Poe's birth certificate was false.

Romero also asked why the fund seems to the cell phone numbers of teachers, referring to text messages circulating that Legarda had filed a bill that would diminish teachers' benefits. "Who except the government?" he asked.

"You can see that there is some truth to this ang mga kapanalig na nagsasabi na buong duma," Orbos told the reporters. "Ang may capability na ganyan sa opisina ng gobyerno."

Wang sino ang gumawa kay (Adan) Montenegro, eh di ang gumawa nito. Kung sino ang gumawa ng disqualification case kay FPJ, sino din ang gumawa nito. (Whoever was behind Montenegro and the case against FPJ is behind this)," Legarda declared.

Damage control

Lacson also seems on the offensive. "Now they are trying to pin the blame on me as part of their damage control," he said in a statement.

He said Balmaceda's spin doctors were linking his political adviser Gus Bumpus to lawyer Victorino Soriano, the one who filed the case against Poe.

In the same statement, Romero said Pelaez spin doctors were making a big thing about what he said was an "accidental meeting" with Soriano at Café Adriatico in Malate, Manila, last week.

"The meeting I had with Soriano was purely accidental since I was there to meet with former Santiago del Norte Gov. Evarista Mapagu-Ong, which is based in Novaliches, Quezon City. The goods were supposed to have come from the Unit. of 30006 and Canada but were transferred to MV Evergreen in a port in Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

Nuestro said his office had yet to check with its counterparts in the US and Canada to determine whether the chicken indeed came from the two countries. With reports from Tarra Quismundo

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CHARLIZE Theron gets a hug from a friend after winning the best actress in a drama for her work in "Monster."

Hobbits rule Golden Globes; Murray, Theron, Penn win

And the winners are . . .

(2nd of winners at the Hollywood Foreign Press Association's Golden Globe awards on Sunday night)

Motion pictures

Actress, Drama: Charlize Theron, "Monster."

Actor, Drama: Sean Penn, "Mystic River."

Picture, Musical or Comedy: "Lost in Translation."

Actress, Musical or Comedy: Diane Keaton, "Something's Gotta Give."

Actor, Musical or Comedy: Jeff Bridges, "Seen as It Is and Was."

Foreign Language: "Osama," Afghanistan.

Supporting Actress: Renee Zellweger, "Cold Mountain."

Supporting Actor: Tim Robbins, "Mystic River."

Director: Peter Jackson, "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King."

Screenplay: Sofia Coppola, "Lost in Translation."

Original Score: Howard Shore, "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King."

Original Song: "Into the West" from "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King," by Howard Shore, Fran Walsh and Annie Lennox.

Television

Drama Series: "24," Fox.

Actress, Drama: Frances Conroy, "Six Feet Under."

Actor, Drama: Anthony LaPaglia, "Without a Trace."

Musical or Comedy Series: "The Office," BBC America.

Actress, Musical or Comedy Series: Sarah Jessica Parker, "Sex and the City."

Actor, Musical or Comedy Series: Ricky Gervais, "The Office."

Miniseries or Movie Made for Television: "Angels in America," HBO.

Actress, Miniseries or Movie Made for Television: Mary-Louise Parker, "Angels in America."

Supporting Actress, Miniseries or Movie Made for Television: Jeffrey Wright, "Angels in America."

Supporting Actor, Miniseries or Movie Made for Television: Mary-Louise Parker, "Angels in America."

Cecil B. DeMille Award: Richard Douglas. AP

Penelope Cruz (Pedro Almodovar's "Volver") and Johnny Depp ("Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl") were also nominated.

Cruz, who was born in Spain, said she was "very surprised" to be nominated. "I'm very happy to be here. I'm very happy to be in the United States. I'm very happy to be in Hollywood. I'm very happy to be in Los Angeles. I'm very happy to be in the Golden Globes. I'm very happy to be in the Hollywood Foreign Press Association

ERC orders Meralco to roll back rates

Page page A1

Delia said the order showed the benefits of having electricity rates unbundled. The grass-roots firm has a pending petition with the ERC for an average rate increase of 12.16 centavos per kWh.

"The new order refers to the generation that is a pass-on cost for Meralco. It does not affect unbundled," Dr. Is Delia said. "Our petition for a rate hike concerns other charges (distribution, metering and supply)."

The People Opposed to Sin tarifon Electricity Rates (Power) and the ERC order was a small victory for consumers.

"The reductions are a result of measuring public pressure against rising power costs, but it remains to be seen if the effects would be for the long term," Renato Reyes Jr., a consumer of Power, said.

Appeasement

"We believe these orders are meant to appease the public and are dealt one whether these benefits would last when the elections are over," Reyes said.

Pete Ilagan, president of the National Association of Electricity Consumers for Reforms (Nascore), said his group welcomed the ERC decisions.

"We hope that, with the ERC having a new chair, many other decisions favoring consumers will come, particularly ones concerning Meralco's rates," Ilagan said.

The Petitioner from Cebu Coalition said the rollback could have been larger if onerous provisions in the IPP contracts—fuel and the PPAs—representing around electricity were canceled. The FIC and the rollback was temporary. "Even if rates are lowered this time, the IPPs can increase it the next time."

Newly installed ERC Chairman Rodolfo B. Albano said at a briefing that the decisions order is unanimous. Meralco talent was reached at a meeting on Jan. 15. The order has yet to be signed.

The ERC's new ruling on Meralco's amended petition to allow the recovery of charges representing costs incurred in buying electricity from the IPPs.

Meralco proposed a reduction of 19.88 centavos per kWh from the current generation charge of P3.4029 per kWh. The company explained that the reduction was due to lower generation costs between May and September 2003, as well as the drawdowns of the end-factor of an increase in the IPPs.

GRAM

The cuts in electricity rates are part of the Generation Rate Adjustment Mechanism (GRAM), which limits the adjustment of generation-related charges once every three months. The adjustment is subject to ERC approval.

GRAM replaced the discretionary, utilities' month recovery adjustment, also known as the PPA, which could be increased or decreased monthly without ERC approval.

Albano said Meralco had promised for the suspension of the reduction in distribution charges but the ERC denied the petition.

He said the decrease in transmission charges was a result of the first steps of phasing out the cross-subsidy within an electricity grid. Cross-subsidies refer to consumers shouldering part of the costs for other consumers of different classes (industrial users subsidizing households within the same grid. Consumers from one grid also pay part of the costs for consumers in another grid (Luzon users subsidizing consumers in the Visayas).

The removal of cross-subsidies is required under the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001.

Albano said the initial stage of the phase-out would result in savings of 6.2 centavos per kWh for households and P10 per kilowatt of demand for bulk users.

IPP concessions

Early this month, Meralco announced that it had concluded negotiations with its IPP, First Gas Power Corp., which resulted in a package of concessions worth P10 billion.

Meralco's IPP review committee has signed an amended supply deal was signed with First Gas, which includes immediate savings for consumers of P10.6 billion, or 1 centavo per kWh. More consumers would actually benefit from the savings is not yet clear.

Committee chair Manuel Estrella said that consumers would begin to receive the full benefits of the amended deal once it was approved by the ERC.

Terms said the negotiations with First Gas were finalized on Dec. 29 after a series of meetings held over 17 months. Meralco buys electricity from First Gas units from the Pantasil Power Corp. and Quezon Power Philippines Ltd., also an IPP.

First Gas owns the 1,200-megawatt natural gas-fired power plant in Sta. Rita, Batangas, while SGP Corp. has the 500-MW plant in San Lorenzo, Quezon. Power owns and runs the 470-MW coal-fired plant in Mauban, Quezon.

Negotiations for increases in Meralco's power purchase deal with Quezon Power have yet to be concluded.

In August last year, Terms said negotiations with the IPPs would give consumers savings of P3.27 per kWh.

Terms said total concessions organized from the renegotiated deals with both First Gas and Quezon Power could add up to at least P44 billion over the duration of the contracts. Meralco's 25-year supply contracts with Quezon Power and First Gas are good until 2025 and 2027, respectively.

Bishops call for vigilance in polls

Page page A1

polls didn't go into specifics but said: "Well, it's all over the newspapers, especially the Inquirer."

The pastoral statement came in the wake of election-related controversies, such as the botched automation of the elections, the disqualification case against tennis aces and opposition standard-bearer Fernando Poe Jr. and the inclusion of allies of deposed President Joseph Estrada in the administration's senatorial slate.

Top military and police authorities, however, dismissed fears of post-coup attempts and assured the Church leaders of "honest, peaceful and orderly" elections.

Asked how the CBCP came to its conclusion about the coming elections, Capalla said the bishops "shared their experiences [on the coming elections in their respective areas], so that's from fairness and honesty."

The CBCP called for vigilance under the circumstances.

"There are indeed shortcomings and threats to our democracy, a trap of life. But the weaknesses are threats that are best safeguarded by a vigilant and informed citizenry during times of elections," Capalla said. "The opposite scenario would be recourse to violence, attempted coups and anarchy."

In this critical moment, we hear Jesus' assuring words, 'Be not afraid,'" he added.

PNP reaction

Senior Supt. Joel Goltiao, Philippine National Police information officer, said there were no actual threats coming from any group that might be planning to sow chaos in time for the elections.

"The threat text is not that serious," he said in a telephone interview from Cebu. Sabi nitong sa, PNP Director General Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. and other top police officials were suspecting possible election-ha hazard.

Only the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was considered as an "election area of immediate concern," owing to the rumbling of election-related violence it experienced in 2001, the official said.

Seventy-two of the 114 precincts across existing since the 2001 elections were found to ARMM, according to Director Leocadio Santos Jr., chief of the PNP directorate for operations.

Other "persistent armed groups" were found in Eastern Visayas and Central Luzon.

Senior Superintendent Ebdane and the other police officials have been inspecting election hot spots in Jolo, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, Zamboanga City and Cotabato City (online) and the PNP wanted to personally assess the political situation in these areas.

Policemen deployed in these areas would receive firearms, vehicles, communication equipment and other logistics, Goltiao said.

AFP reaction

In a phone interview, Lt. Col. Ismael Lucero, armed Forces chief information officer, dismissed as "mere speculations" talk that some military men were planning to mount another coup d'etat.

"We assure the public that the Armed Forces will stick to the Constitution. We will stick to implementing government plans and programs. We will not indulge in any moves related to the decision-making process of the government," Lucero said.

"We are here to implement the people's will, and not in any way intervene in any (un-)constitutional moves," he added.

The military also dismissed a proposal from a group calling itself the Citizens' Committee on National Crisis for the Armed Forces to take over the government.

"We consider the move as inciting the soldiers to violate their sworn duty to protect the people and the state. For it based on self-centered values which are aimed at promoting a small group's political agenda, instead of genuine and real values which the military adheres to," Lucero said. With reports from Christine F. Dupuyoc and TJ Burgonio

Guingona defection plan . . .

Page page A1

Guingona Jr. was considering joining the political camp of Jinggoy estar Estrada Poe Jr. They must have forgotten the old saying: All politics is local.

While Guingona has denied reaching any formal understanding with Poe, his son and namesake will run for Congress under the banner of the opposition.

Poe's own running mate, Sen. Loren Legarda, made the decision yesterday announcing that "Sodium Guingona III was the Lakas ng Demokratikong Pilipino candidate in the second district of Bukidnon.

But the decision has also loosed that Guingona's son is not the only opposition candidate in that district. Former Defense Secretary Antonio Bebias of Joseph Estrada's Pwersa ng Masang Pilipino and Regional Governor Jose Ma. Ramon Villasenor of the Nationalist People's Coalition are also contesting the seat currently held by first woman Rep. Jocelyn Sefiel Andaya of Lakas.

A source said the matter was currently under "arbitration."

Searched for comment, Governor Quintin Ilagan III, Poe's campaign manager, said that as far as he knew, the matter had already been resolved, and Guingona's son was the official candidate. But the source, who requested anonymity, had furnished the newspaper with a list of candidates for various local offices in Bukidnon, insisted that the arbitration was still ongoing.

Legarda remained mum on whether the older Guingona, her good friend and mentor, would accept Poe's offer to serve as an adviser.

All she could say for now she said, was: "I know we'll be together soon."

She noted that when she left the ruling Lakas-CMD party in November last year, Guingona also resigned from the party as its president.

"I never asked for his political support but I'm confident I have his love and support," she said.

Sotto said the BNP was working on a meeting with Guingona in an to "get down to the details" of his ambitions for him to join them. He said the BNP would not on "official" meeting with Guingona soon.

"We're keeping our fingers crossed he'll finally agree to the invitation," he added.

President Macapagal-Arroyo's campaign spokesperson Michael Defensor said the possibility of Guingona joining Poe had a "high climb value," because the Vice President was still seen as a key political force who would add credibility to Poe's presidential bid.

Defensor admitted that while the rise between Mr. Macapagal and Guingona had chilled once his resignation from the Cabinet, "this possible move in Poe has still come as a surprise to us."

He said Guingona's flight in Poe's camp would have a bigger impact compared to the defection of Vice President Teofisto Guingona Jr., Estrada Information Minister Jose Luis Martin Gordon, to the news actor's side. With reports from Cynthia Balana and Fatima Bello

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Take down posters, or else: Abalos warns candidates, including Gloria

By Marvin P. Mortel

MAKE those posters clean, or else...

Election chief Benjamin Abalos Sr. yesterday warned candidates—including the President—against putting up posters and campaign materials in areas not specified by the Commission on Elections.

"I've had a lengthy meeting with the law department and I ordered letters sent out all the candidates, including the President, to pull down their posters or face disqualification proceedings," Abalos said.

Poster and streamers have spread everywhere in the past weeks, way before the start of the campaign period on Feb. 10 for national candidates. Abalos said he can save the countdown from his office in Intramuros. The candidates have three days, upon receipt of the letters, to remove the posters.

The Comelec chief said that he would hold election officers, diocesan and provincial election supervisors responsible for drafting common poster areas and enforcing Comelec rules.

Parallel to this move, Comelec law department head Atty. Adolfo Dalaly has recommended the filing of election offense cases against newspapers which run the anti-Fernando Poe Jr. ads.

The ads, aimed at showing that presidential candidate Poe was an illegitimate child and an American, featured the 1939 birth certificate of the candidate and the 1940 marriage contract of his parents.

Abalos said he does not know anything about Dalaly's recommendation, but added that it might be submitted today before the commission which meets on Tuesdays.

"We will have to investigate, so we can have a basis for prosecution," Abalos said.

The Philippine Daily Inquirer, according to an ABC news clearinghouse, is among those included in the charges.

Opposition wants GMA disqualified

Cabinet turned into private campaign group–Tatad

By TJ Burgonio and Juliet Labog-Javellana

THE BOOK is now on the other foot.

The opposition will seek the disqualification of President Macapagal-Arroyo as a candidate, "for turning the Cabinet into her new private campaign organization."

Nationalist Peoples Coalition (NPC) senatorial bet Tatad said yesterday said he will petition the Commission on Elections to disqualify Ms. Macapagal after statements outlawed about participated Cabinet meetings called at Malacañang on Jan. 7 and 14 "to discuss her campaign strategy" for the coming polls.

"This is a flagrant and gross violation of the law. They're using government resources, public funds and all the other candidates... and they've converted the entire Cabinet into a private campaign organization," said Tatad, a former senator who is eyeing a comeback.

Memorandu, signed by Press Secretary Ricardo Saludo, were reportedly issued to the officials to comply with the directives, Tatad said at a press forum at the Manila Hotel.

"In the case of the Macapagal campaign, the necessary of forming a shadow campaign spokesman, the presidential adviser on official development projects is also the media coordinator for the campaign, and the defense secretary is doing harmonization with the official in charge of logistics, and all other Cabinet members are being required to resign one undersecretary each to campaign headquarters," he said.

Ermita, dean Benjamin Abalos declined to comment, saying only he did not want to be "preempted."

Malacañang, for its part, brushed off Tatad's charges.

"We're confident (the complaint will not prosper). The President did not issue (the) memo(s). But we have to respect the independence of the Comelec," said Presidential Secretary Mike Jobinol, spokesperson for the President's campaign.

Presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye said Malacañang was leaving the matter up to the Comelec.

Defense Secretary Saludo for the memos Tatad cited.

He said Jalosjos made a mistake when he went to the minutes of a Cabinet meeting some three weeks ago that Cabinet members who would be involved in the President's campaign should designate an undersecretary to run their departments.

He said what the minutes were not presented at the next Cabinet meeting, at least three officials including Social Welfare Secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman told Saludo that there was no such agreement.

"I'm sorry I will protest it accordingly," he quoted Saludo as saying.

Defense said that memo, which was actually the minutes of the meeting, was "corrected and withdrawn. It was never issued."

Defense also said the President was not present during the Cabinet meeting where there was a slide presentation of the guidelines for Cabinet and government officials involved in a political campaign.

But still Soliman said the other Cabinet officials agreed that they should not relinquish their duties just because they were supporting the President.

He said the Cabinet members could campaign for the President because they were her political officers, but it was made clear that they could not use the resources and manpower of their offices to do so.

Tatad was quick to clarify the disqualification case against the President was not in retaliation for the disqualification case filed by lawyer Victorino Mario against KNP presidential bet Fernando Poe Jr. on the grounds the latter was not a natural-born Filipino citizen.

The Comelec last Friday dismissed the Mario petition for lack of merit. Poe's camp reported that Malacañang was behind the petition, but Palace officials denied this.

SAD MO: They're using government resources, which are denied other candidates.

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THE DAILY GOSPEL
Tuesday, January 27, 2004
2nd Week in Ordinary Time
1st Reading: 1 Kgs 3:4-13
Gospel: Mk 3:21-35

Tondo project wins World Bank contest

A DEVELOPMENT project proposed by a Tondo-based community organization was adjudged a winner in the Philippine Development Innovation Market Place Competition titled "Participating Project" and sponsored by the World Bank.

The Kaisahayan Foundation's proposal, "Balikbayan sa Simula Pero sa Bandang," won award and a trophy and a cash prize to start up the project, along with 16 other winners out of a total of 1,000 entries nationwide.

Former President Corazon Aquino together with World Bank officials witnessed the awarding of prizes at ceremonies held on Jan. 16 at the Magsaysay Hall, Magsaysay Mandaluyong City.

Former Rep. Nestor C. Dona Jr., founding chair of Sentinyuan, said the project seeks to increase realproperty tax collections in Manila by decentralizing tax data through a real estate system overseen by Barangay Bitukang, in order to involve dozens of collectors between taxpayers and metropolitan government personnel.

Dona said the proposal calls for a system of rewards and sanctions with the issuance of good taxpayer cards that would provide preferential treatment and discounts in government services and in selected business establishments.

Dona said that with the system, he sees real property tax revenues increasing by 30 percent in the first year, 60 percent in the second year and 100 percent in the third.

SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

JUDICIAL ETHICS—Failure to enforce legal fee constitutes simple neglect of duty of clerk of court.—Clerks of court are the chief administrative officers of their respective courts. They must show competence, honesty and probity since they are charged with safeguarding the integrity of the court and its personnel. They are to discipline officers and other court personnel who fail to exert utmost effort in the collection of legal fees and are expected to correctly and efficiently implement regulations. Simple neglect of duty has been defined as a disregard of duty resulting from carelessness or indifference. The failure of this respondent to collect from the complainants, no bond nor bail bailiff having been attributed to her, constitutes simple neglect of duty. Pursuant to Civil Service Rules, simple neglect of duty is classified as a less grave offense, punishable by suspension of one month and one day to six months. [Libarios vs. Gatchalian, 1 Ifio Blvd., Pio Duran, Manila] en Quezon], A. M. No. P-03-1744, October 7, 2003]

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The WORLD

Editor Lorenzo R. Tanada

US loses 5th chopper in Iraq crash

BAGHDAD—The US military lost its fifth helicopter this month in Iraq, which crashed in the Tigris river while searching for a soldier whose boat had capsized. The aircraft's two crew members and the soldier remained missing Monday.

"We have no news about the [progress of the search]" in the face of the missing service members, a military spokesperson at the control command in Baghdad said Monday.

The CH-53D Sikorsky Phantom helicopter, attached to the 3d Infantry Division, crashed in the Tigris in the northern town of Mosul on Sunday evening during a search-and-rescue mission after a river patrol boat overturned in the area a couple of hours earlier.

Two Iraqi policemen and an Iraqi translator accompanying the American soldiers in the boat were confirmed killed in the incident, said the spokesperson. But one soldier was still missing "which is how reports were sent," she said.

"There was no word on the cause of the crash or the captain," said the spokesperson, ignoring an avalanche of questions.

US troops sticking to the same script under "General Confusion" this week were fired on, she said. An Iraqi policeman manning one of the checkpoints was killed in a drive-by shooting, witnesses said.

Other witnesses said a US patrol boat under rocket-propelled grenade fire in Mosul on Monday for three hours no casualties. Mosul is 390 kilometers north of Baghdad.

In Kirkuk, 255 km northeast of Baghdad, two Iranian intelligence agents suspected of anti-US activities were arrested Sunday and handed over to American authorities, Monday said police Lt. Jameel Qadir.

Four other helicopters have crashed in Iraq this month, three of them brought down by enemy fire. The fourth crash, also involving a known Marine, occurred in Kuwait. Two Marines were killed.

The crashes add to the mounting losses for American forces in the US-led civil administration of Iraq perhaps to hand over power to a sovereign Iraqi government on July 1.

But the plan—which envisages a non-elected government to take over after regional caucuses—has run into stiff opposition from powerful Shiite Muslim leader Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf, who wants direct elections. AP

INDIA REPUBLIC DAY
Indian Border Security Force soldiers mounted on camels march in procession during Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi, Jan. 26. India celebrated its 55th Republic Day with a huge military parade and folk performances. —AFP

Group slams US for 'retroactively' using rights to justify Iraq war

LONDON—US and British leaders George W. Bush and Tony Blair are wrong to use universal human rights principles as justification for launching the invasion of Iraq, a global rights group said on Monday.

New York-based Human Rights Watch criticized the allies for using a blood war in Saddam Hussein's dictatorship—until as the 1988 massacre of Kurds—as a reason why the level of slaughter could have justified armed intervention.

"Only mass slaughter might permit the deliberate taking of life involved in using military force for humanitarian purposes," the group's head Kenneth Roth said in his annual report.

"Blood on Saddam Hussein's [Iraqi] hand[s], the origin of the Iraq government's killing in March 2003 was one of the exceptional and dire circumstances that would justify humanitarian intervention," he wrote in one of the report's 13 essays.

"The Bush administration never cited the war in Iraq as a humanitarian intervention, and neither can Tony Blair."

In the runup to war, both cited Saddam's alleged banned weapons as their main concern. But after discovery of hard evidence of weapons of mass destruction, that have played growing emphasis on Saddam's gruesome rule.

"Bush has encouraged the erosion of core treaty and rights principles that it could undermine future humanitarian interventions.

Both condemned Washington's "allies-are-here, others-go [justify the Iraq war]" while a French and UN peacekeeper in the Democratic Republic of Congo last year that was "clearly mastermind" by the neighboring country.

"The Iraq war and the allies unjustly a move in part to humanitarian rather than giving humanitarian intervention a bad name... it could be dangerous for people in need of the next war."

Before receiving no war, the international community should have condemned the regime of criminal dictatorship, which helped supply Iranian Revolutionary Guard with weapons and Liberia's ex-president Charles Taylor, Roth argued.

In another damning map on Iraq, the group chided the powerful countries for "watering" human rights.

"The United States and its partners have revered human rights issues as matters of secondary importance," wrote essay and former Soviet and Post Worldwide.

"The rule of law has not advanced and... [Iraq] is still short by the legacy of human rights abuses of the former government, as well as new ones that have emerged under the occupation." Reuters

World Briefs

Democrats trade jabs

MANCHESTER, N.H. — The Democratic presidential contenders launched an attack campaign for votes in New Hampshire on Sunday and sparred over who offered the best shot at beating US President George W. Bush in November. Sen. Joseph Lieberman, the primary race's front-runner for late momentum, said independent decision-making. John Kerry, struggling after losing lead in polls, defended his legislative record and said Howard Dean, his fellow Democrat, was "the Republicans' best friend" on foreign policy and taxes. Dean, the former governor of Vermont, said the Iraq war was a "terrible mistake" and "we are less safe now than it was before." The war and said his rivals' promises to balance budgets, improve education and provide health insurance while also cutting middle-class taxes were "a lot of hooey." Three other Democrats, Wesley Clark, John Edwards and Joseph Lieberman, is scheduled to make a last charge and avoid their campaigns who need voter's support in contests with nine opponents on the race intensified. **Reuters**

Iran electoral law

TEHRAN — Iranian MPs voted to change the country's controversial election law, in a clear act of defiance of a conservative watchdog that has banned thousands of candidates from running in February's parliamentary elections. The hardline Guardian Council has barred nearly a fifth of the 8,200 reformist candidates from the race. Efforts mostly allies of reformist President Mohammad Khatami, including 80 of the standing 290 MPs. The proposed reforms to the election law says candidates given the green light in previous elections cannot be blocked unless a full legal justification is presented. This would save the candidates many disqualifications. **Reuters**

Sudan refugee crisis

ABUJA, Chad — The UN refugee agency said on Sunday that it would face a major challenge to cope with over 100,000 impoverished Sudanese refugees who have spilled across the border into Chad to escape increasing violence in their homeland. "I cannot stop speaking this disaster is unfolding before my eyes. Water is the most problem in this emergency," Pope Sturm, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) coordinator for eastern Chad, said here. "We have to work really to reach the water table. For 100,000 refugees we will have to spend about $1 million just on the wells," said Sturm. **AFP**

4 Russian soldiers die

MOSCOW — Four Russian soldiers were killed and another four wounded in a rebel attack Sunday against a federal convoy in breakaway Chechnya, interior ministry officials told the RIA Novosti news agency Monday. The ambushed convoy was travelling through a gorge from the town the village of Kirzi in the mountainous southern Chechnya region when a blast erupted. The rebels then opened fire with automatic weapons on the Russian convoy. **AFP**

LIGHT SHOW
An image is projected on the cathedral of Burgos during a light show in celebration of the Jacobeo Holy Year in Burgos, Jan. 24. Burgos is one of the stops along the "Way of St. James," a Christian pilgrimage which leads across northern Spain to the tomb of St. James the Greater in Santiago de Compostela, in Spain's Galicia region. AP/EFE

2nd rover Opportunity sends new Mars photos

PASADENA, Calif. — Nasa's second Mars rover, Opportunity, aimed "on target almost to the inch" by safely landing inside a shallow impact crater, coming face to face with the first exposed bedrock ever seen on the Red Planet, mission scientists said on Sunday.

The spectacular outback unfold on Saturday came as mission controllers at Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory made progress in pinpointing the cause of a malfunction that has shut Opportunity's twin rover Spirit on the opposite side of Mars.

As planned, Opportunity rocketed down to the heart of a wide, flat plain known as the Meridiani Plateau, an area believed to contain large deposits of a crystalline, iron-bearing mineral called hematite, which on Earth usually forms in the presence of water.

But the years landing site would hardly have been ideal, Nasa scientists said.

In a stroke of luck, Opportunity came to rest inside a small, shallow crater — roughly 30 meters wide and 2 meters deep — and just a few feet from the intriguing bedrock formation visible on the inside lip of the crater.

"We have scored a 360 outbounder, best planetary hole in town, and we are actually inside a small impact crater," Steve Squyres, the principal science investigator for the rover mission, told reporters at a briefing afternoon briefing.

The first pictures beamed back from Opportunity barely after landing showed a remote as the rover previously seen on the mission surface.

Besides the first bedrock ever found, much of the landing area appeared darker in color and dotted in fine grain and small gray rocks devoid of the rocks and boulders littering other areas on Mars, including Spirit's outcrop ridge in Gusev Crater, a suspected basin thought to be the site of an ancient lake bed.

The exposed bedrock was a particularly exciting discovery.

"The texture of bedrock is one I've never seen before," Squyres said, explaining the scientists with the "deepest up" surface at Gusev Crater. "This is the home neighborhood of Gusev rocks."

Squyres said he was intrigued by a soil mixture that looked pebbly but, when scuffed by the landers, seemed to have the consistency of talcum powder. He said the dirt will be tested by the instruments bearing material that made the Meridiani Plateau a region of exploration to the discipline.

After the landing of Opportunity Sunday, the US space agency has delivered the latest line of responsibility among dozens two robotic probes on Mars, just three months apart, in search the signs that the barren planet was once warmer and more hospitable life, than it is now.

Viewed by a protective shield of air bags upon landing, Opportunity initially came to rest on the side has righted itself as it was designed to do. Still in an irregular shape to survey nearby, 450 million kilometer-trip journey from Earth, the rover successfully to raise panels to charge its batteries and began sending pictures and data back to Earth.

Barring unforeseen complications, the six-wheeled robotic will roll off its landing platform in a week and a half or two weeks to begin exploring its surroundings.

While Opportunity emerged from its descent and history landing in perfect health, Nasa engineers said they would take more time preparing the rover for its first journey, using data sensors beamed to Earth from a reconnaissance the rover has explored Spirit.

Scientists believe they have cracked the problem in a glitch in Spirit's memory and can work around or undo it within a few weeks. Using the analogy of a hospital patient's condition, Mars exploration rover project manager Jim Theologis said Spirit's status "is still serious, but ... I think we've got a patient that is well-suited to respond to treatment." **Reuters**

US solons 'excited' about Libya, see restoration of ties

TRIPOLI — A delegation of US lawmakers on an historic trip to Libya's capital Tripoli on Monday said they were confident the United States would eventually restore relations and end economic sanctions.

"We're very excited and pleased about the direction your leader has taken. We want to be friends," the head of the delegation, Democratic Representative Gary Ackerman, told the Libyan officials in the room the delegation at Tripoli airport.

The lawmakers arrived on a US Navy plane and Ackerman said it was the first US military aircraft to land in Tripoli since Gaddafi overthrew the United monarchy in 1969.

Ackerman praised Gaddafi for his pledge to abandon efforts to possess weapons of mass destruction and for his decision to resolve the 1988 Lockerbie bombing with the United States and the United Kingdom.

"We want to tell him (Gaddafi) that because of his actions we are here to work a new step with the Libyans. We are here to take a message back to the American people that not only has been very positive," he said.

"We achieved certain goals that we supposed to (make of the) dialogue of a new direction (in Libya). It's a whole new experience," Ackerman added.

Another US lawmaker, California Democrat Tom Lantos, arrived in Tripoli on Saturday on a separate mission.

The Libyan government announced last month that it was abandoning programs to develop weapons of mass destruction, opening the way for better relations with the West.

Libya has also taken steps to resolve long-standing disputes with the bombing of a US airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 and a French plane over Niger in 1989.

Libyan Prime Minister Shukri Ghanem said the meeting US lawmakers pledged to lobby hard in Washington to push the US administration to lift its sanctions and allow a visit known the US oil firms to resume work in the country. **Reuters**

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OPINION

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What's he thinking?

AN ANECDOTE is sold of US Presidents Calvin Coolidge who had a reputation as a very taciturn man:

At a party in the White House, a woman bet her friend that she could get President Coolidge to utter at least three words. The woman and her friend approached Coolidge and she said, "Mr President, I bet my friend here that I can get you to utter three words."

EDITORIAL Coolidge said, "You lose."

We are reminded of this anecdote by the checkpoints given by former Sen. Miriam Santiago-Defensor of Fernando Poe Jr. She said in a recent interview that he is "very laconic" and is "a very taciturn man." Judging from the way FPJ has been speaking (or not speaking), "laconic" and "taciturn" may even be understatements.

Poe set a record for brevity in the declaration of a presidential candidacy when he said at the Manila Hotel on Nov. 26: "I am Fernando Poe Jr., and I am running for president of our country."

We did not give even a hint about his program of government, but then Sen. Vicente Sotto III said that he and certain groups would hold brainstorming sessions. On Dec. 10, Poe wasn't even around when he was officially named standard-bearer of the "united opposition." Through a phone patch, he said that he would tell the united opposition what his response was.

He surprised everyone when he showed up at a forum on globalization at the UP Diliman in Quezon City on Dec. 12. After a meeting with militant leaders, Sotto said he heard Poe tell Rafael Mariano, chair of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, that the country should not participate in trade liberalization until it is prepared to compete. Mariano himself said Poe said three of his "position against globalization and trade liberalization."

Dec. 16: Poe said that for four or five hundred years, Mindanao had inherited nothing but abuse. "We can achieve a [bright] future for Mindanao if we join together for one vision. ...One vision, one Mindanao."

Dec. 23: Poe said, "I am honored and proud to accept and recognize the offer to be the Kaalyansip ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino's presidential standard-bearer."

Jan. 2: After filing his certificate of candidacy with the Commission on Elections, Poe declined to make any public statement.

Jan. 10: Poe declined unequivocally that he was a Filipino citizen. Asked about his citizenship by reporters, he said: "Yes, I am a Filipino."

Jan. 15: Talking to an audience composed mostly of stevedores in San Carlos in his home province of Pangasinan, Poe said he was no one's puppet, no one's clone and not "another Erap." He said he was not carrying any political baggage and he would face his "greatest challenge with honesty and sincerity."

Jan. 21: Poe "charmed" the members of Philippine Inc., an organization of business groups, according to its chair, Jesus Francia Jr. Poe said he wanted "to restore the trust and confidence of the people in government."

So far what Poe has given the electorate are generalities and motherhood statements. But then, it may be said, the presidential campaign has yet to begin. He may yet surprise us and personally reveal the details of his program of government while on the campaign trail. So far, he seems to be playing it safe, keeping his public statements to a minimum.

One of the politicians to the recent past who also basically kept his mouth shut was the late Sen. Genaro Magsaysay Magsaysay, who once ran for vice president, is remembered by reporters who covered him as a "taciturn" news source. He explained why. "Critical style: "Many talk, plenty mistakes. Little talk, fewer mistakes. No talk, no mistake. So why talk?"

FPJ may not have heard Gene Magsaysay's statements, but he apparently he is adopting the same strategy in the current presidential campaign. Let spokespersons and surrogates do the talking for him. If you have to talk, make short motherhood statements. Better yet, just smile and wave to the crowd, and you won't make any mistakes. Remember, you're the King, you're No. 1.

But a presidential candidate is not a mannequin or a wound-up doll to dummy who mouths what the "brain" behind him wants to say through him. He cannot remain forever an actor who has to read lines or memorize a script. He has to engage the people in an intelligent dialogue. The voters have a right to know what he believes in, what he feels, what he intends to do if elected and what his views are on current developments.

The media, the academe and political and civic organizations have the obligation to draw him out of his self-imposed shell of silence and make him speak out on the issues. FPJ has to talk more. The people want to know what his thoughts are.

Bird flu is nature fighting back

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

BIRD flu, mad cow disease, SARS, Ebola and even AIDS—how one thing is common: *they're nature fighting back. The Americans* (cows and foreign chemicals), the Chinese and Cherry with forbidden sex) and the rabies and the Africans—they are all nature's protests against the disease that man inflicts on it. The so-called "scientific discovery"—hypertension, heart disease, atherosclerosis, stroke, diabetes, liver and kidney diseases, obesity—they are due to any of man's gluttony.

Even the plague of the Middle Ages was caused not by rats alone but by man. Man built the sewers that became the ideal breeding ground for rats, and promoted so much sewage that rats bred in. The rats ingested dead people and the bacteria responsible for the plague multiplied in the rats, spread in an infestation of fleas, the carriers of bubonic plague. Whenever man alters the balance of nature, disease follows.

Biochemical research scientists do not like this comparison to poultry, piggeries and cattle feed lots. The animals are packed so close together because man wants to get more and more profits from as little space and capital as possible. When an animal gets sick, it infects the others very quickly in the entire way that outrageous diseases of humans like colds, flu, typhoid and guerra-enteritis spread quickly in places where people congregate.

Fishpond operators put too many fish for getting as their tilapias and kalapunda for more of greed. Shrimp fights back with harmful. So many fish in a limited space don't get enough oxygen from the water and die. The fish drown, literally, suffocating people that hated as before because fish live in the sea are. To destroy means to suffocate and fish cod bones is more than lack of oxygen.

We see in the movies cattle grazing in wide open rangelands under blue skies and not fresh the cattle like a relaxing life. *What you don't see* is what happens after the cowboys call them to cattle feed lots. Then they are packed like sardines in inflated cattle cars. They can't sit, they can't even move, they can't lie down, they defecate where they stand.

In every instance if they are transported by ship. They are packed in the hot, fetid and dark cargo holds, without fresh air, during the long sea voyage. Some of them actually die because of the crush.

We can sometimes see hogs and chicken transported in the same appalling conditions on trucks, the chicken packed so closely in their cages that only their heads can move, the hogs standing shoulder to shoulder, sweating with the movements of the truck, unable to sit or lie down.

You see on TV the big piggeries with the concrete floors and workers hosing the hogs with water and sweeping away the manure. But you don't smell the stench or see the backyard piggeries where the pigs wallow in standing mud mixed with their manure and flies buzzing around them.

When the cattle, hogs and chickens reach their destinations, you think their ordeal is over? Not for the rest of the chickens or hogs. *Quick death follows, except for those sold live* in the wet markets. In fact, we quick for those who sell end up as fried spring chicken. They are the equivalent of human children whom they say pay to death. The fried chicken sold on the streets are the equivalent of human babies marinated because they are males that won't be able to bear eggs. There's no profit wasting food on them.

The lychee & kids that make glamour/ manicure women are the equivalent of babies sold cooking on their mother's breasts when they are killed, stuck bone mouth to cause with human bones, and then roasted over hot coals.

Pigs that are killed in slaughterhouses are lucky. They are executed by electricity. They die instantly, painlessly. But those killed in backyards die horrible deaths. Their throats are slit and they die slowly. They die of blood loss and of suffocation as their windpipes are slit. They scream in pain and terror. The pigs waiting for their own execution hear them. You can imagine the terror in their hearts.

I don't understand why housewives, who don't want any barbecue eaten or their own dinner, go to the wet markets to buy live chickens or live rabbits and mouflon only to have the rabbit kill them in front of their eyes, the fish by actually stabbing them on the head. They buy live crabs or shrimps and since they get home put them in a pot and boil them in water. As the water gets hotter, they can hear the crabs screaming for the torment of the pot and to the shrimps dying in the rapidly heating water. They are slowly dying. As the water gets hotter and hotter, the jumping becomes faster and the screaming more desperate until they stop. They're dead. How can the supposedly kind-hearted housewife stand that?

I don't understand why people go to Chinese seafood restaurants to choose live fish, crabs, shrimps, lobsters, clams—all alive—only to have them killed and cooked. Then they want the waiter to wait game to celebrate the beginning of life, forgetting the many lives they have just killed.

I don't understand why people buy guns or, worse, marry their friend, dogs, live only to have the wonder dish them on the head with a hatchet. Then they give drinks with the cadavers to celebrate the anniversary of when a friend's life began.

You may find this column revolting. But it is intended to make you stop the Filipino and Chinese practice of torturing live animals only to kill them. It is intended to make you love your opposite for the flesh of animals.

Invitation to a mugging

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

I REMEMBER someone telling me in Bangladesh some years ago that with housing constituted to be a rampant problem in that country. Such was in events, she said, that even male students were known in practice it. In some villages, she said, those students made it a point to make do their wives of their best chair so that the neighbors would not have their wives' greatest or awesome when they were inside. In short, at least they were ashamed of it, she hinted said, but most others were not. They did it openly, as a matter of right.

I remembered this when I read about the new survey that said 8 percent of Filipino women, aged 18 and above, had experienced physical abuse, mainly from their partners. Husbands were the majority of these partners. Most of the victims suffered the physical abuse repeatedly, some 66 percent saying they were hit more than once and another 30 percent sometimes more.

Interestingly, while most of the respondents, classified as they are by the A, B and C classes, said spouse or partner battering to be a crime, a majority, in the words of the survey, had "the strongest agreement [that Aquino deserved what happened to her."

I personally do not see that as a contradiction. The late Aquino ministers was by no means a run-and-shot case of spousal abuse. Or if it was, the abuse (if ever there) isn't one is considered as such) did not go quite in one direction. The problem there is to begin with was extraordinary, or indeed always extraordinary. I have many women friends who to this day do not buy Aquino's version of the story. What made things worse for Aquino was that she ever went to town on TV with the story and, aided by her fan bunch, heaped abuse on Marquez with impunity. That was power which ran very dangerous having previous fit de chance to all his side. There are all kinds of battering, and media battering is one of them. Filipino women do have a sense of fair play, which media regularly flout in their self-righteous Aquino cries while they find wife battering reprehensible.

There is condoned by most administrations, or downright written, for the wife to be prepared to carry out her spousal duties every time. That is, provide sex on demand. The Church does say that explicitly on occasion: the wife may not say no to her husband. Of course, it doesn't say that in a very stern, but the subtext was flown to women showing aggressive behavior, on the ones reminds very much one-way. You have a situation where the husband has all the legal and moral right to demand food on the table, sex in bed, and the wife has the moral duty to comply with the wife's duties to please her husband and may not leave him come hell or high water—desertion ends all sorts of certain legal and moral consequences—but the husband has no corresponding physical duties toward the wife—he may well lash out when he feels he feels displeased. As a matter of right. The existence, where it exists, comes only from being convenient, not from being violent per se.

Condemning physical abuse should help, but accepting or changing the laws that patently discriminate against women should help even more. The laws on inheriting for example, is consistently stacked against women. All it takes is a shred of evidence to convict a husband of battering his wife. But it takes a lot to make a man for concubinage. That, too, is bolstered by culture, by generalized modes of behavior for men and women. Despite the laws, or often because of them, men are expected to philander and may even become providence-resting a harlots. Women are expected to be faithful and may never be rumored, particularly if she is a politician, to be a flirt.

One of the reasons the battered wives stay for too repeating them seldom says it all. It is the only kind. The ways of men and angels think it to.

That is an invitation to a mugging.

DOLE exec's case being watched by other Cesos

A LAWYER called up to suggest that the lawyers who have sponsored Fernando Poe Jr.'s claim to being a natural-born Filipino and the US Embassy if he ever applied an American passport, file for sibilings who are US citizens. The lawyer thinks that US authorities may hold the key to the FPJ analogy's controversy: If FPJ had applied for US passport, it would put the issue to rest once and for all. This is a good suggestion, and I am certain that if formal representations are made with the US Embassy it would provide the answer.

* * *

Migrant workers in Italy continue to make commendable strides, as noted Filipino labor leader and sculptor Totoo Concepcion, who served as labor sectoral representative in the Senate era, pointed out. The workers are now represented in the "consultative committee" in seven cities in decision-making agencies so that their welfare can be improved. This came in the wake of the regularization of undocumented overseas workers last year. Concepcion added that Filipino migrant workers in Italy are very much esteemed by society, considering the recent clamor to control, or even ban, foreign workers that now make workers play in Italian society. Noting that Filipinos comprise the largest single immigrant group in Italy he said that this bodes well for the 30,000 Pinoy workers in Rome and the other cities in the country. Concepcion also said that Filipino migrant workers in other Italian cities, but this is the first time Rome will hold such election.

* * *

In the past two months, the Pinoys in Rome have campaigned for registration until the end of this month in 16 "municipalities," which will each have two migrant councilors. But Concepcion stressed that the most important concern is for the local voters to register. Cityhall "selects the big decisions and funds." As Italy are into city council seats, one of which has to be filled by a woman. They represent four continents: South America, Asia, Africa and non-European Union countries. Concepcion feels that the Filipino workers ought to get the maximum councilor's post numerically as they have the largest number of overseas female workers in Rome.

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cavanaugh

His candidacy is Analiza Ramos Maguire, a Batangueña who works and lives in Rome with her Filipino husband and two children. A member of a cause-oriented multi-ethnic organization, she began as a domestic worker but is now publisher of a newspaper, "Ako ay Pilipino." Concepcion describes Maguire as intelligent, pretty enough to vogue with the best models and then extremely dedicated and eloquent—"at ease to be precise."

The problem is she must bless dummy. There are seven to eight other candidates for that one council post. Concepcion said members of cliques have appealed to the Pinoys not to divide the estimated 5,000 votes needed to elect each councilor and Concepcion cites the tragedy of Pinoy-dominated Daly City in California which produced three Filipino councilors for same. "It would really be a pity and a shame if the 30,000 strong Pinoys in Rome cannot produce 5,000 votes," he said. I hope our forebearers in Rome will get their act together and work hard to attain victory for the "Asian" city councilor as this will end once and for all being "second to the country's five other non-council-seat settlers.

* * *

Labor Undersecretary Jose M. Espanol Jr., a **Career Executive Service Officer (Cesc) 1**, serves Presidential Management Secretary at the end of last year to appoint his son, which is being standard by other Cesos around the country. **Espanol, a UP Law Class '84 graduate**, was pinkslipped from the Cesc post and installed to the Office of the President, reporting directly to **Undersecretary Ismael Sueno for political affairs**. He was assigned to develop a micro-economic program that will harness the potentials of seven to eight million overseas Filipinos whose investments will be managed by the government and some banks. As Espanol cashed in, the banks' lending windows will be open to their relatives and other groups from 43,000 barangays nationwide. With the present slowdown in remittances of the overworked, the idea is for affluent informal workers to be encouraged to return to their homeport so that the cities will be decongested and social funds can be channeled to education, urban planning, science and technology.

* * *

Espanol's program was received well by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas and the PNB. It was launched in Tokyo during the President's state visit in December 2002, with an overseas chapter organized in Italy. By the first quarter of 2003, an initial investment of over $300,000 was deposited with the Land Bank and Espanol was given a performance rating of "Almost Outstanding" and "Outstanding" by his superior and subordinates, respectively.

Then his fate turned sour. The President stopped his program and he was replaced without explanation. Moreover, the new dimension of cash, position and salary guaranteed by Jose Cuisia Sec. 7 of the Cesc Guidelines was disregarded. Many, he says, dropped from the payroll and his salary stopped the 14 months may become a hotbed between the CSC and DOLE from his OIC, Puglisi, Philbanks and other coordinators were not notified, according to his records. Atty. Ricardo Lebon Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas and Undersecretary Ismael Sueno to explain Espanol as undeserving for workers' promotion and welfare, in violation of Section IV of the Joint Circular No. 3, which says, "During the prescribed period of detail, the mother agency can only appoint an OIC to the post temporarily vacated by the Cesc employee in the post."

Espanol has filed a harassment case before the Ramp supervisor that court against Sto. Tomas and was other DOLE officials as well as Civil Service Chair Karina Conrel. Just in case he said that she no Cesc Career Executive Service is an old hand. Malacañang has to correct that this grave injustice done to a career officer.

Beyond repayment

"All I am is debt to strangers," someone said. And I once tried to pay it back but the stranger would not allow me. My parents were exiled but two exiles are less because he quickly recovered more than what I had paid.

Being in debt to strangers...I have almost lost count of the many kindnesses people who have made me carefully poor. But I'm also a stranger to a multitude of other people, so I would marvelously be.

Well, the system functions of that idea may be interesting to some people, but I just have my reasons when I need to settle my debt with a stranger.

It is an old habit of mine to ask my self that, to ascertain the predicament of looking for a way and having to hurry since I can get a head start over thousands of other maneuvers.

This summer, three and a half years ago, I stepped into a bus with two burgers in hand. I had bought one and got the other for the driver. But then he wouldn't take it. I insisted myself seated beside a stranger for an impulse instinct any thought of repaying any debt, that so I gave a burger to the old man who was beside me.

Before I knew it, I was fumbling supply to his mouth. It was like opening a delicacy that would not close.

Old habits are also there. They still are in even if it's not here now, and even if you don't ask. And often don't just tell, they outscore. They don't want to miss trivial details. That's why I often find myself posing as an unwilling listener to the grandmother's narrations, be it about the Spanish era or a typical soap opera.

The stranger told me about his children—where they were living, their professions, their families. I could sense his pride in everyone of them. But he didn't say a word about his wife, if he still had one.

He told me about his investments in church activities which occupied most of his time now that he was "shifthless." Then I later learned that he wasn't going to visit any of the children that day. He was saving his brother instead.

I was just nodding all the while as he was telling the times. I didn't ask any question what might reach a mistaken nerve. And he was eating his burger hungrily since I nibbled on mine.

Then with a big smile on his face, he told me, "It's my birthday today, so it's quite appropriate that you gave me this."

I wished him in turn and, without considering if it was proper for me to say so, I wished him a happy birthday. I'm sorry that I couldn't offer him a drink to complete his meal. But I couldn't say much.

Then I realize that in an instant, he was no longer a stranger to me. I felt that I knew him.

The old man must have took more than three hours, but I learned something very precious from it. I cannot say what it was exactly, but every time the memory comes back it brings a smile to my face and I begin to feel good.

I was tired I will tell Angie to realize that my impulsiveness had been transformed into a virtue.

That day, I thought I had partially paid my debt to a stranger. But the old man was quick to put me in debt again. He paid for my fare which cost much more than the budget that I actually got for him. Somewhat sneaky he had given the conductor our fare, while showing his senior citizen's ID.

I was humiliated again. My attempt to pay back part of what I owed proved futile. I realized that I couldn't pay when you are for repaid. It was as hopeless as chasing the wind, as human said.

It seems that our debts to strangers can never be completely settled. It may be a bit frustrating, but I like it that way.

Jose B. Abertazzi, 23, is taking the master's in mathematics at the University of the Philippines Diliman.

YOUNG BLOOD

from R. Abertazzi

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? Reactions/contributions from the twenty-something set/below — Ed.

Knowing Grandma

Mark Richard F. Dinio

IN JANUARY last year, two weeks before her 81st birthday, my maternal grandmother passed her destiny into a physician, left her home of 62 years, found her way to my mother's office and went home with her to live with us. She has not left since.

She wastes little in the one-bone side of Metro Manila while we lived in the south. On the occasions we were to visit, I preferred to mingle with cousins instead of trying to know her better.

In time, she she moved into our home since I got to know some things about her. This lady whom we call Grandma, is the daughter of an American father and a mother who was rumored as "blue-blood-Iberia." She herself must have been a beauty in her time. But seeing all I can see is an old lady with a crown of gray hair, deep creases on her face, a stooped back, aches and pains, and a tendency to forget things a lot.

At home, she quickly proved to be a big help in my tenancy mates. She can still recall many things as if it happened only yesterday. She can sing old songs without missing a beat or a word. She even teaches me Spanish phrases.

She is also a devout Catholic. Everyone who has lived with someone that ancient would tell you it isn't all fun. Since she is hard of hearing, we have to raise our voices when we talk to her. There she would demand to know why we are shouting at her. She would ask the same questions five times in a row and repeat the same line of questioning here to the day. Manner of speaking, she tells everyone that it is her last day here on earth.

One day, she insisted that mother visit the priest to administer the last rites. When the priest arrived, there she was in the garden, talking to our dog.

I have learned that unfathomable patience stems not the think of their young child. I know some young parents who suddenly died, leaving behind grieving children. And here is my Grandma making for her Creator to call her back to Him.

God must have reasons for keeping my grandmother here on earth for so long. But until the time comes for her to go, I will make the most of the time we have together. So please excuse me for now. I have to watch her the telenovelas.

Mark Richard F. Dinio, 28, is a marketing management sophomore at De La Salle University-Manila.

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The loss of the Sto. Cristo de Burgos

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Ricardo L. Harper

FIRST of the curiosities and traditions of the Philippines are the devotions that have developed around various religious images such as the Nazarene in Quiapo or the Child Jesus in Tondo. Devotions, however, these traditions disappear and the images that were once venerables forgotten and neglected or worse, sold to antique dealers or collectors. The following account tells us of the results of the Sto. Cristo de Burgos that may still be in a church in Camarines or may have disappeared. It is one possible that the story itself may be true, but the names and even towns have been changed by the present parishioners.

In the month of June 1761, the galleon San Cristo de Burgos left the port of Cavite for Acapulco, bringing the usual commercial goods on board. It carried 350 bales of silk, 60 cases of porcelain and wait for favorable winds. These were not unusual cases it was an open case full of coral cards and of little depth.

On the 23rd of July a storm occurred that ran the ropes and drove the ship on the rocks.

Captain Don Francisco Xavier de Urbiola, a member of the Audiencia, to look into the matter, went behind the last of the ship and to apply all appropriate measures on how it. He consulted a jolina compound of experts on the subject, who concluded after much deliberation that it was not possible to how the boat due to the fact that when it ran aground, it had broken open, and the bilge had collapsed along with the keeson and other principal pieces. It was better to check her than take her apart, saving the ancillary and think cared pieces from parts that were above water.

With everyone in agreement with this judgment, Sr. Urbiola ordered that after saving the coral and other supplies, they take the image of the Sto. Cristo de Burgos and Sr. Justo Rubio and Sr. Pedro Bautista to the shore. After that, the ship was lost on the 27th of September together with all those all the cargo, causing huge business losses.

The following year Sr. Urbiola died and the Recollects took hold of the POSS and the devotion of the Sto. Cristo until 1793, when the devotion attached the town, burnt the church and held the statement captive.

Luckily the image was saved, having been hidden in the mountains and the town was reunited to in the port of St. Justice on the entire island, which was the place where ships anchored since the galleon was lost. Devotion to the image continued.

After Archbishop Gainza was promoted to the See of Barbastro, the king named D. Carlos Bermudez Gonzalez-in Castro, a native of Los Angeles in Puerto Rubido, to the archbishopric of Manila. After receiving the royal order he was consecrated in June 1792. He remained in Mexico three years and in 1795 he left Acapulco.

He was received in state in Manila on July 28, and on Aug. 22, he received the mantle from Fr. Herrera, Bishop of Cagayan, in the parochial church of Quiapo. He took office on Aug. 23, 1795.

That same afternoon, he celebrated the ceremonies of ringing the bells in the cathedral during afternoon in the Sixth Mass, and taught the people to stop and remove their hats at the ringing of church bells, out of respect and not to wear them inside the church. He also decreed that in the afternoon residents should leave the school in procession while singing the rosary through the streets nearby. He also established the annual memorial of seven Masses in the Recharch St. Joseph.

His tenure was short. He fell sick the following year on Dec. 3, and on Dec. 13, he died at the age of 51. He had earlier requested that his heart be embalmed and returned to the city of Mexico and deposited in the convent of San Lorenzo before the altar of Our Lady, where one imagines it remained until 1898.

(From Pedro Pineiro, "Historia de Filipinas," MLC.)

Western ambassadors meddling in RP affairs

LETTERS

THE INQUIRER issue of Jan. 11, 2004 contained two news items pertinent to the discharge of functions by the diplomatic corps in the Philippines. One was about the scheduled exit of some European ambassadors at the time Rikhil Pharma in Mississippi City "to monitor their gubernatorial opposition-to-be-head-penalty."

Of course, diplomats have duties and privileges. But while they could make representations concerning economic legislation, for instance, affecting their countries, their concerns on some areas, like political, would be viewed as meddling in the internal affairs of the receiving state, and are not sanctioned by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Then there is the "consignment of UN Ambassador Francis Santarosa to Iraq. Of course, the United States regards the Philippines as a non-friendly state and we should regret the departure of an ambassador from Manila wherein he has a very active stay. But Sacramento has been an active one to say the least. Sacramento has been an active one to say the least. Sacramento has been an active one to say the least.

—ATLANTA G. LAZOS, ambassador (Ret.), PO Box Primrose St., Barrio Lapindoy, Iloilo City

Poe should speak out on issues

THE POPULARITY of Fernando Poe Jr. as a candidate in the coming elections is on the rise. He now leads in the surveys by a wide margin.

This is a curious and worthwhile development. To date, FPJ has not expressed any opinion on matters of public interest. He merely waved and covered a few phrases in his supporters when he announced his bid for the presidency. Still more and more Filipinos are being won over by his campaign, blindly aside the fact that he lacks the necessary credentials to become the nation's chief executive.

It can be argued, FPJ supporters say that even if he doesn't have a PhD in economics like President Macapagal-Arroyo, he can have the best and most brilliant economic advisers and Cabinet officials. So, in general of a leader who serves and supervises the functions of the government, we will have a leader who will be dictated upon by known Einstein who if FPJ indeed wins the elections.

FPJ should at least prove to us that he is qualified in run for the presidency by using his opinions on public issues. What, for instance, is his view on the Supreme Court ruling that the P1.2 billion compromise/no contract for the national executive is null and void? Or what is his take on the call for "no election"? Does he know that the country's debt to GDP ratio is already above 100 percent?

For that matter, we still have to hear him speak about the allegation that his cronies run for the presidency because he is not a natural born Filipino as the Constitution requires.

Just yet, his popularity as a presidential contender is rising.

He lies in a real world. He need jobs, food, clothing, shelter and security. All this cannot magically appear if he hold on to the fantasy that a popular actor can run as in charge of the country. He can't do it. I hope many of our voters realize this before it is too late.

—BA. LOUIES SANTOS, CP Hilman, Quezon City
mabuc_ta@yahoo.com

The (dangerous) silence of the lambs

I AM fascinated by the way the lawyers has been giving such prominent coverage to the case of Marivic Aldey Genosa, sentenced to death in 1998 and now ordered released from prison, following a Supreme Court review of her case. I consider the case so important that I will be using it in my classes with medical students and hope something similar can be done with all our law schools as well as institutions training health professionals.

Let's recount the what happened, based on the court's records.

Genosa was first found guilty of parricide by a court in Imus, Cavite. The court pointed on Nov 11, 1992, Genosa "did willfully, unlawfully and feloniously attack, assault, hit and wound one Ben Genosa, her legitimate husband. . ." The court added that because Genosa had done this "with treachery and evident premeditation," she deserved the death penalty.

Fortunately, Genosa was able to appeal, with lawyer Gamma Legarda coming to be the defense. With the help of her lawyers and psychologists, Genosa was able to prove she was suffering from the "battered woman syndrome," with the following signs: (1) the woman believes that the violence inflicted on her is her own fault; (2) the woman is unable to place the responsibility for the violence elsewhere; (3) the woman fears for her life and for her children; and (4) the woman believes her abuser is omnipotent and omniscient.

In addition, Dr. Dina Gaing testified that Genosa had contracted hepatitis from her husband, had undergone a caesarean and another 33 times for "severe hypertension due to unknown cause."

Reviewing these new findings, the Supreme Court overruled that Genosa had acted in self-defense, and reduced her sentence from capital punishment to six to 10 years. Because she had already been in prison for more than six years, she was ordered released.

The Genosa case has many implications for our country. Mainly, I was struck by how Genosa had in fact pleaded self-defense when she was first tried, but the court ruled that there was no violence immediately preceding the murder. A number how many Genosas have been—and will be—victimized by our judicial system's lack of understanding of domestic violence.

Coincidentally, the same day the Supreme Court ruled on Genosa, Social Weather Stations (SWS) released a survey where 9 percent of the female respondents said they had been physically abused by their husbands, saying that hints was inflicted by their husbands, boyfriends or live-in partners. In the same survey, 12 percent of the male respondents admitted they had physically harmed someone, the majority of whom were their wives, girlfriends and live-in partners.

What our lawyers and judges need to understand is that the cycles of violence that vary but because the battering is chronic and because more and more frequent, are events with get worse over time, sometimes, and the long-suffering victim/ survivor may not necessarily be triggered by a violent act.

The syndrome is eerily similar to what we see in people recruited into cults. Abusive spouses or partners, like cult leaders, manage their victims' minds by making them totally dependent, so that even if they are constantly abused, they may on, sometimes even blaming themselves for the violence. They may on, too, because their dependency relationships make them believe their abuser is all-powerful, and that their is no escape.

Victims of domestic violence often do not fight back, some even turning to self-destructive behaviors, including suicide. Note that if Genosa had been executed, the message that would send out to other battered women was that their should just bear with their suffering.

Genosa fought back, and the fact that she shot her husband, and then bludgeoned him with a pipe, calls in it wasn't just pure cop-anger but that she was terrified, ultimately a desperate one that she would never again suffer from the abuses. The court only saw the violence of women's violence, not the violence inflicted on her by her husband over the years.

Her husband's death was not instant relief for Genosa. She languished in jail from the time of her arrest in 1995, through her death sentence in 1998, until the Supreme Court ruled in her favor. Even with her release, she will still need help to deal with many old wounds.

Genosa's case is important, but domestic violence is can not be resolved in court trials, hopefully to help more battered women from being doubly victimized, first by their partners and then by the courts. The Genosa case is particularly instructive because it shows how our judges are willing to even send a battered woman to death row. I've written in the past about why capital punishment is so dangerous because it is imposed so capriciously.

Law schools should tackle this landmark case, together with advances on gender issues and gender-based violence. I did want to alert the health professions as well to the Genosa case because it so graphically represents what could happen when battered women are unable to get help. Since Mrs. Genosa's doctor had treated her for minor but physical injuries, I am sure there were many other times when she did not seek medical help because the injuries, at least the physical ones, were "hidden."

Four, yes, that the trainer case Genosa 33 times for severe hypertension. Our medical, nursing, occupational and physical therapy schools should all be teaching students how to detect signs of domestic violence, especially in the less visible emotional and mental injuries. Health professionals are sometimes too quick to dismiss complaints like "back pain," "high blood" and "nerbios" as "psychosomatic" when, in many cases, they are victims of violence, many by whom battered women are trying to ask for help.

Democracy is only the first step. Health professionals need to know where to refer battered spouses. The congressional spouses' organizations have set up hallway houses in every region for survivors of domestic violence but we still need many more of these refuges, as well as counseling centers. The SWS figure showing 9 percent of women suffering from physical abuse means we may have some 3.1 million people living in violence. Many of them bearing the violence like battle, in dangerous silence.

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

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Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Burgonio

Search for fishermen enters 3rd day

By Alcuin Papa
and Gil Donoso-Duno
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

SHIPS and planes entered the sea off La Union and Pangasinan for the third day yesterday, searching for nearly two dozen fishermen missing since huge waves smashed their boats to pieces.

Six bodies have been found after the disaster Friday night near the eastern town of Bangar, 250 km north of Manila, when fierce winds and swells as high as two-story buildings crashed into the fleet of small wooden vessels.

Local officials said 102 fishermen either swam ashore or had been rescued while clinging to the wreckage of their boats.

At least 22 were still missing, said Francisco Ortega III, an official in charge of the search-and-rescue efforts.

"I don't want to give false hopes," Ortega said. "Let us be realistic."

In San Fernando City, 25 more fishermen in La Union and Bangar remained missing as of 6 p.m. yesterday, Nigel Lorayne, regional director of the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), said.

Two light planes, four helicopters and dozens of navy and Coast Guard ships continued the search-and-retrieval operations in the South China Sea, the OCD said.

'Freak accident'

Ortega described the disaster as a "freak accident" because the sea and the wind were calm just before capsizing started.

"The fishermen were caught by surprise," said Gary Fiesser, the mayor of Bangar.

Bangar was hardest hit, with a dozen of its fishermen missing and buried dead.

"Nine after-noon-week as, as all as sea story holdings," 47-year-old Alfredo Macapaz said on Sunday after he and his barangay ran managed to swim back to shore.

Fatalities

The latest fatalities were the residents Ramon of Bangar, La Union; Danilo Asuncion of Luna, La Union and a still unidentified male.

The body found in the waters of Balaoan town on Sunday had been identified as that of Orlando Peralta of Luna town. The unidentified female was taken to Jesus Funeral Homes in Bauang town.

According to the OCD, 222 fishermen from Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur and La Union set out to sea on Friday night after a week of being grounded due to bad weather.

Of the number, 146 had returned home while 56 were rescued by teams from the Air force, Navy and Coast Guard, and by other fishermen. Of 37 boats reported missing, only 12 had been found.

The number of survivors who went to safety or were plucked from the rough seas climbed to 179, the National Disaster Coordinating Council said. This surprised reporting a grueling 12-hour search-and-rescue operation.

Three bodies of fishermen were recovered over the weekend and another was on Monday, floating near a lighthouse and a naval base in La Union, where most of the missing fishermen had sailed from, officials said.

The northern Coast Guard commander, Eduardo Lagata, said the fishermen set out Friday when the weather was calm but ran into a squall early December. His weather bureau said winds churned up 2 1/2 to 4 meter high waves in the area about 200 km north of Manila.

A 100-member search-and-rescue team, 6 boats, planes and helicopters, remained operations Monday amid improved weather conditions, Lt.col Garet Commodore Arthur Domingo said.

Marvin Ermita, one of the survivors, told ABS-CBN television that he and his companions swam for about 10 hours until they reached the shore.

Another survivor, Johnny Gorbay, said he vowed the body of his relative, Lito Sinching who died during their ordeal.

"He just hun up ... with his and my relatives," Gorbay said, adding the relative probably died from cold and hunger.

The rescue team was joined by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Medical, and relief teams were also sent by the Philippine National Red Cross and the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Assist Supt. Samuel Delante, La Union police chief, said.

The fishermen who were plucked from the sea on Sunday were very weak from dehydration and exposure.

As of Saturday, 11 of the survivors had been taken to Dr Ernesto Nanning and Regional Medical Center here for treatment of symptoms of pulmonary congestion due to water drowning, hypothermia due to severe cold, elevated salt levels and hypoglycemia, due to the prolonged period without food, according to emergency nurse Rommel Lustre. The provincial government has committed to take care of the hospital bills of the victims.

Support

In Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City, Gen. Efren Dominguez, chief of the Armed Forces Northern Luzon Command, identified those rescued by his men as Ryan Cabo of San Cesa, Ilocos Sur; Manuel Bano, Senen Sobrepeña, Gerardo Abundan, Rimmel Peñaredo, Aurelio Bituen, Dionisio Ramos, Pilmon Lafte and Freddie Matias from Cabo, Luna and Bangar in La Union.

The Sidcom, according to Dominguez, sent four rubber boats to Barangay Cabo, Luna, in La Union, a patrol craft SP 340 to Lingayen Gulf, a patrol ship PF 10 from San Narciso, Zambales and a ship from the Coast Guard's Islander in Subic.

Two helicopters from the Army and the Air force helped in the search-and-rescue operations. Navy warships also joined the rescue work. With reports from Tonette Orejas and Gene Villa, PDI Central Luzon Desk; AP and Reuters

Church radio station turns down poll ads

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
PDI Visayas Bureau

MAY, Iloilo (Updated)—While many print and broadcast media outlets are scrambling for advertisements, a Church-run radio station here has decided not to accept the income-generating political advertisements for fear of losing credibility in the process.

Fr. Bonito Alisagales, manager of Catholic-run Radyo Ng Mary Station dzIM, said their reporters in past elections have taught them a lesson.

Alisagales said the station else does not accept "block time" ads are in the politicians' payroll.

"Because of the irresponsible "block timers," we received numerous complaints from local citizens obviously from those whom they had lambasted on air," he said.

"We don't want our radio station to be used for the vested interests of politicians. There is no possible political 'block timers' will only bring violence," he added.

Alisagales said although the station would miss the chance of earning money during the elections, "we can't afford to be used as a tool for violence." Ferdinand G. Rumola, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Inauguration of Iloilo projects becomes GMA poll rally

By Nestor P Burgos Jr.
PDI Visayas Bureau

CABATUAN, ILOILO—The inauguration ceremonies of government projects here on Sunday by President Macapagal Arroyo looked every bit a political rally.

The President led the launching ceremonies of the P6-billion Iloilo international airport project and the initial road repair and maintenance projects of the Department of Public Works and Highways in the Visayas area.

The President arrived at about 5:30 p.m. at the gymnasium of Cabatuan town, about 24 km west of Iloilo City, after she arrived at Iloilo City, after she participated over the symmetrical switching on of a 18-megawatt power plant of the Mirant Global Corp. in La Paz District in Iloilo City.

But a crowd of around 7,000 was already at the gymnasium more hours. During the five-hour wait, performers took turns entertaining the crowd.

Danilo Suarez, vice chair of the Bond Board, gave P1,000 to each of around 40 performers mostly students and teachers of public schools of Cabatuan.

The Bond Board will implement the P4-billion road maintenance project the BOMO dubbed "Bohulan Nalin, Alagaan Natin, Mahabang Panghahabuyan at Ligtas."

When asked by reporters where the money came from, Suarez said it came from his own pocket.

Half of those who attended were DPWH employees and relings closely from the three regions in the Visayas who came for the launching of the road project.

They were blue T-shirts emblazoned with the project name and the President's initials, PGMA.

On cue from the emcees and Suarez, the crowd kept on chanting "G-M-A" and "Gloria" repeatedly when the President and her party arrived.

Along with the President's party were administration senatorial candidates former defense secretary Orlando Mercado and re-electionist Bojito Lim Mirriam Defensor Gen. Fortunato Bautista.

The three were seated on stage and were introduced by the Iloilo City "cheerleaders" of Senate President Franklin Drilon in the next Senate.

NPA rebels told to draw fire away from Mindoro

LUCENA CITY—With the presence of an estimated 1,000 military combat troops in Occidental Mindoro, communist spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal called on New People's Army units all over the country to retaliate and intensify their tactical offensive against government military forces to divert army attention away from the island.

Rosal made the call as government troops that have been pursuing communist rebels in mountain Occidental Mindoro dashed upon a band of communist guerrillas near the boundary of Oriental Mindoro Sunday morning, which left two soldiers wounded and undetermined number of casualties on the rebels' side.

Rosal said the government-trained Forces on the island should "pay dearly for its service and intensive abuse of the people's human rights."

Military officials have been deployed against civilians, mostly Mangyan natives, in Palawan, Occidental Mindoro and members of a fact-finding mission from multi-sectoral human rights group in the wake of the discovery of an alleged NPA camp last Jan. 14.

According to Rosal, armed insurgents have also been committed against communists, and the people's right to free movement had been violated.

He described Barangay Hanol, too, where the military operations have been concentrated, as a "disaster area" due to massive military operations.

Rosal also called on Mindoreños to immediately cooperate with the National Democratic Front for the immediate forming of a bilateral human rights monitoring body to the wake of alleged rampant human rights violations against civilians and labor activists.

"If Mindoreños were ready to cooperate in pursuing the peace talks, it should take immediate and decisive steps to set up the JMC (Joint Monitoring Committee)," Rosal said.

Army Maj. Jose Rivas, spokesperson of the Armed Forces Southern Luzon Unified Command based in Camp Salipsip here, said the encounter between soldiers and about 30 guerrillas under a certain Ka Ramon happened in Barangay Hanagan, Bongabong town in Oriental Mindoro. Bobby T. Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Tankers' group warns Coast Guard of graft

A GROUP of tankers yesterday warned the Philippine Coast Guard against issuing a certificate of inspection to a sea vessel that carried toxic gaseous chemicals.

In a statement, the Philippine Petroleum Sea Transport Association (Philpsta), represented by Jose Ferdinand Lopez, president, Wagner and Cruz (Seatrade), said it would sue the Coast Guard if it failed in favor of the M/V Subhal Swan.

The Philpsta questioned the action of the Golden Swan, tagged "floating hotel" by some seafarers in areas where it docks, to serve as a carrier of toxic chemicals.

Oscar Saville, Marina administrator, said he refused to issue a certificate to the ship to operate as a general cargo tanker and liquefied gas carrier at the same time after an earlier inspection revealed that it was not equipped to handle toxic cargo.

Golden Swan sought to be allowed to carry anhydrous ammonia and liquefied ethylene dioxide.

According to the National Safety Device, a 55-board gauge, anhydrous ammonia can cause serious illnesses, including blindness and third-degree burns.

"Serious injury can occur with in a matter of seconds," the group's tech news letter said.

Golden Swan has been docked for 40 tankers behind to no dock but it has yet to be issued for safety, according to the Philpsta.

Party-list contender banks on genuine women's vote

BAGUIO CITY—Taking a poll today in Baguio and the small number of women running for elective seats in the May 10 elections will say they expect a boost from the "women's vote." That is the hardcore of the Gabriela party-list group.

The reliance that the women politicians place on this "myth" has stunned Gabriela president Liza Maza revealed.

Maza, Gabriela's top nominee in the party-list elections, resigned from her post as Bayan Muna congressman to devote her time to winning a seat for Gabriela to advocate women's issues in the House of Representatives.

But Gabriela is aspiring for "a genuine women's vote," said Maza, who addressed the first National Indigenous Women's Workshop here on Saturday.

"Women have dominated the electoral process for decades now, but their votes have not always been used to install women candidates," she said.

Superficial

"It is superficial to assume that women will only vote a fellow woman into office. In that sense, there must be a women's vote, but this is not what women politicians have always defined for themselves," she said.

By May, Gabriela hopes to wield genuine women power to install both men and women candidates whose legislative agenda respond to the poverty and degradation experienced by Third World women, Maza said.

The 20-year old Gabriela is the second party-list group to campaign on a feminist platform. The first active women's party to win a national post in 1998 was Bantay Pinay.

Maza was elected as a Bayan Muna representative in 2001, along with party-list president Satur Ocampo, and labor leader Crispin Beltran.

Lawyer Ibaky Clara Ramiro, a neophyte politician who is running for nomination here, said many politicians expect Gabriela to draw the most party-list votes this year because it could be the first political party to harness the "women's vote."

"I know these bad votes born a women's vote. I had to conduct my own studies to calculate the risks I would be taking. By joining politics, but I spoke to many of my friends and they agree that we could benefit from a Gabriela vote," Ramiro said.

Politically active

Maza said the Gabriela coalitions records indicate that women have been the most politically active people in the last few elections, and are therefore politics most influential gender.

"Based on the demographics of the Commission on Elections during the 2001 elections, 1 to 2 percent more women registered to vote than men. The same number of women actually voted compared to men. In fact, more women have been registered to the political campaigns, and have been used by politicians to organize their political campaigns," she said.

But what concerns the women party-list group now is how Filipinos would perceive Gabriela during the campaign period, Maza said.

Maza said "the get none for Filipino women these days is still poverty," which justifies Gabriela's campaign against the machinery of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

She blamed Mr Macapagal for the country's economic crisis, which she said had been perceived by a P1.36 trillion consolidated national debt by 2003. Vincent Cabreza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

HERO'S VIGIL
Mia Bangayan, father of US Army Specialist Solomon Bangayan who was killed in an ambush in Iraq, keeps vigil by the coffin of his son during a wake for the slain Filipino-American soldier Jan. 21. The younger Bangayan was laid to rest with full military honors by US government officials.

Army chief reminds troops to be nonpartisan

JAMINDAN, Capas—The commanding general of the Philippine Army yesterday called on soldiers to remain nonpartisan as the start of the campaign period for the May elections nears.

"... I mean no nominal everyone to keep your political sentiments to yourselves and leave nothing to do with other people's political stand," said Maj. Gen. Efren Abu in a speech during turnover of command ceremonies of the Army's 2nd Infantry Division in Camp Gen. Macario Peralta.

He told the soldiers that public is "not part of your job description" and that "we are not political leaders nor public office."

Soldiers, he stressed, should instead help other government agencies to ensure clean, peaceful and orderly elections.

Abu presided over the ceremony of Maj. Gen. Gabriel Ledesma as the new 2ID commanding officer from under the 5ID-town the island of Panay, Negros, Cebu, Bohol and parts of Mindanao.

Ledesma, of the Philippine Military Academy Class of 1975, formerly headed the 2nd Infantry Division based in Tuburg, Ilocos. He replaced Maj. Gen. Reynaldo Alcaraz, a member of the PMA Class of 1973, who was assigned as the new commanding officer of the 5th Infantry Division based in Isabela.

Drastic reforms

Abu called on commanders to employ new measures of the Army under the Tuburg motto. He said "drastic reforms" were made to ensure the success each the lower levels of command.

He said he expected support in the battalion-level way among the gripes raised by soldiers now known as the Magdalo group who staged a mutiny on July 27. *Nestor F. Burgos Jr. PIR Visayas Bureau*

Contractual named ARMM executive secretary

COTABATO CITY—Gov. Parouk Hussin of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has designated a contractual employee as regional executive secretary, the region's "Little President" in his absence.

The appointee, a former lawmaker in raise the question of "leadership mandate and sense of responsibility" against lawyer Emma Salman, special assistant to the Office of the Governor, reboot Hussin had designated in the position vacated by resigned Executive Secretary Hadid Tan.

The lawyer obtained a copy of Hussin's designation order from her office, although she was not available when sought by comment.

Hussin designated Salman "officer in charge of the Office of the Executive Secretary" in a memorandum dated Dec. 27, 2003 and released by the ARMM Manila liaison office on Jan. 1.

Former ARMM Assemblyman Sam Pike Mastura, and Salman, who works for the Seventh Deputy for Mindanao (CDM) and holds a concurrency post in Hussin's office, was "not even a regular employee of the ARMM."

"What can happen in the government, if you put an entire region under someone who is not even aware to perform official functions under civil service rules?" Mastura asked.

Mastura said Hussin had apparently circumvented RA 6734, the ARMM Charter, which authorizes the President to appoint to acting governor in case the elected governor is unable to discharge his political and administrative functions in the region.

The 8-4 Coalition of Hundred Muslim Assembly has studied Hussin to represent the country's Muslim nationality in its executive since Hussin has since filed his candidacy for senator.

Hussin has also designated one of his executive assistants, Sebastian Dimaisip, as a member of his office.

ARMM Vice Gov. Mahid Mutti has also filed his candidacy for governor of Lanao del Sur. Mutti is Sen. Tan for congressman of the lone district of Isla.

Mastura said the regional executive secretary presides over regional cabinet meetings and runs the affairs of the regional government in the absence of the governor.

He said a mere designation to the post would not suffice because the law requires an appointment for the executive secretary that has to go through the scrutiny and confirmation by the Commission on Appointments of the Regional Legislative Assembly. *Thadd B. Mendoza, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

NEW EXPRESSWAY RATES

'Users pay' plan seen in toll way

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—The Manila North Tollways Corp. (MNTC) has not yet determined the final toll rates at the North Luzon Expressway but said it is starting to observe the "users pay" principle in recovery its $371-million (19.4 billion) investment and get reasonable returns.

"It is 'pay as you use' approach, the most recovery for last motorists to amount from motorists directly benefit from it," the MNTC said in a statement.

Incorporate, the MNTC said the rest of roads built out of government funds "equally distributes the burden to both users and non-users in a stronger like manner."

Private motorists

The Lopez-owned firm is banking on private motorists rather than on government to rehabilitate and maintain the infrastructure project, which is about 84 percent completed to December last year.

The MNTC also said the initial results of the study it commissioned from the University of the Philippines Planning and Development Research Foundation Inc. have affirmed the "users pay" principle.

"Toll road charging toll fees are well used in both developed and developing countries in the world," the study said, citing the roads in at least 16 countries.

Cost effective

"They have successfully utilized toll roads to provide safe and cost-effective services to their growing economies," it said.

Dr. Norman Ramos, head of the team that conducted the study "Socio-economic impact analysis of the NLEX project," said in most of these countries "people prefer to pay for the use of road infrastructure on a pay as you use basis, in contrast to paying taxes."

The modernization project for the 38-year old NLEX will be completed in October this year, MNTC officials said.

The 84-km road connects Metro Manila, Central and Northern Luzon. The project suffered a seven-year delay due to public, financial and legal problems and toll rate. President Macapagal-Arroyo ordered it finished.

The government has tapped the private sector to extend and expand the NLEX and the South Luzon Expressway under the Build-Operate-Transfer law.

Ramos said there is a "strong" public perception of "user pay policy" when for money-base government infrastructure projects.

The reasons he cited were rationalized roads, construction delays due to government cash flow problems and corruption and an overall culture of impatience.

Frustration

"Motorists are frustrated by congestion on inadequate and poorly maintained roads which cost money in wasted fuel, downtime from work and unnecessary pollution and accidents," he said.

Rates at the NLEX, which is managed by the state-owned Philippine National Construction Corp., fetched a maximum P1 for every kilometer.

Marylene Ochoa, MNTC assistant vice president for public affairs, said consultations with the transportation, motorists and economics groups are being planned to help set the new toll rates. *Noel De Ocampo, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

Abra a 'peaceful place to live in,' says cop chief after covenant

By Artha Kira Paredes
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

BANGUED, Abra—"Here has not committed anything wrong and it is a peaceful place to live in," said Chief Supt. Rowland Albano, regional police director, during the signing here on Friday of a covenant for peaceful elections.

Candidates for the May 10 elections from 27 towns of Abra attended the signing.

Before the signing, a forum with panelists that included Albano, police director Artemio Ticlino, election regional director Armando Velasco, Sup. Luis Bernardo Gov. Vicente Valera, Inaugural Mayor Zita Valera, Fr. Flora Bautista (representing Bishop Artemio Rillera) and Teodor Sup. Rodrigo Fontanilla was held.

The candidates were given the opportunity to ask election-related questions to the panelists. Most questions were directed to Albano and Velasco.

Lagman also imposed candidate. Cipriano Lagma, request of the "goons should not be roaming around" in Lagman. It was agreed upon that the candidates should be responsible for their own people.

Lt. Col. Mayor Allan Israel Bronco was assisted by Lt. Col. Leopoldo Ogamon, commanding officer of the 41st Infantry "Bonifacio" based in Abra. Also, the Army would take care of Siva People's Army rebels who were roaming the towns and working for some politicians.

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Governor Valera said he hoped they would achieve their goal of holding credible and honest elections and campaign peace and order even after the elections.

He said candidates had made a "gentlemen's agreement" and he hoped that they would be able to keep it.

The election of town officials is one of immediate concern for those who are elected to office.

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ROUNDUP

'Bayanihan' builds center

CENTRAL SAMAR CITY—The United Nations Multi-Donor Program (UNMPC) on Friday turned over a multi-purpose center to the village officials of Sa-Kang San-Jose here. The center is to cost the said by Presidential Assistant to Mindanao Jesus Dureza, Mayor Pedro Alcaraz Jr. and other officials and of UNMPC personnel. The P600,000 multi-purpose center was created through the "Bayanihan Training Scheme," a new technology known as Country-Based Training and Enterprise Development initiative. Through this scheme, the beneficiaries, who are residents in the area, availed of hands-on training in carpentry and building construction and design. While undergoing training, the workers were given allowances. Lucky of the 51 town residents who worked for the building was awarded certificates and accomplete set of carpentry tools worth P 150,000. The project, financed by the governments of Spain and Australia, had solicited assistance from the Philippine Government it is 41 days. *Apolito Z. Cinco, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Medicamen seek posts

CALAMBA CITY—Six councilors here are seeking re-election posts during elections. They are Incumbent Vice Mayor Ramon Guevarra, Councilor Joe Antonio, Independent; Fernando "Ding" Segui Jr., city councilor under the Nationalist People's Coalition; Lt. Gerardo Medina, vice governor, Independent; Jose Ramon Gonzales, Nationalist People's Coalition; and Ramon Ramos, Nacionalista "Jake" Martinez, Board member, 1st district, Independent; Rolando "Lino" Martinez, Board member, 2nd District, Independent; and Manny Ferrer, city councilor under Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats. *Rosario S. Rivera, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Canarines exec hospitalized

NAGA CITY—Two days after allegedly being bullied by Camarines Sur Gov. Luis R. Villafuerte, Tinoban Barbosa, provincial administrative officer, landed at the intensive care unit at the Ospital Ng Sangay here. Barbosa suffered from a mild stroke after the governor allegedly got mad at him, grabbed his shirt's collar and threatened to send him to a cultural village in hell town of about 50,000 people. Barbosa's aide said, according to Barbosa's wife Shirley, Villafuerte denied the allegation. He said he could not probably collar him because Barbosa was sitting behind him. He claimed that his only participation was to pacify the two officials. *Rosario S. Rivera, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

There were people assigned to do the task. *Alan Palaga, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Advise vs dengue

TARLAC CITY—City mayor Alice Pierce has urged all residents to observe cleanliness to prevent dengue cases here in this city to purchase chemicals to fumigate areas believed to be breeding sites of mosquitoes. It is easy to address the dengue problem in every barangay if the village itself has the information for the prevention and control measures, he said. After observation, or the broad-scale from house-to-house search against dengue breeding hotels, such PTI, 2003. Pierce suggested that each barangay should have at least three kits of antidengue paraphernalia from municipal government allotment. *Ado Salud, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

US-based Pinoys form group to focus on good in RP

By Alan Pal
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—Fed up by all the bad news about the Philippines that reach us the United States of America, a group of 20 US-based Filipinos have started a project that would focus on the good and beautiful things about the Philippines.

The group, called the Philippine Beautiful Committee, was created spontaneously after the Philippine news that the beauty of the underwater life of Apo Island off the coast of Dauin town, Negros Oriental featured at the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago last year.

"We got together because there was a lot of negative publicity about the Philippines," said Francois "Pat" Jaen, executive director of the University of the Philippines Alumni Foundation in the United States.

He said there felt they had to combat the negative publicity about the Philippines.

Jaen said the solidity of the Apo Island reef was a positive image of the Philippines and "if we promote on this image, it would project something good about the country."

Aside said the initiative to the Wild Reef divemaster at the Shedd Aquarium are geared with the campaign, "Welcome to the Philippines!" upon entering.

Then visitors have the see, as if they were visiting Apo island, which the Aquarium asserts, is the "world's most diverse marine ecosystem."

Inspired by the Shedd Aquarium exhibit, they decided that they should undertake a fund-raising drive to support educational and livelihood initiatives for the people of Apo Island and encourage the replication of the Apo Island example in other islands in the Philippines.

After some nine months of fund raising, the Philippine Reef Gala Committee raised more $120,000.

Five of the committee members, Tess and Isabel Jean, Jeanette Berger and Vito and Rebecca Reyes, came to Dumaguete this week to hand over the initial donation of $1 to 000.

The money, which will be administered by Silliman University, will be used for livelihood and educational projects, which will be determined by the islanders themselves through a committee that they will create.

The Philippine Reef Gala Committee is also giving a donation to the Silliman University Marine Laboratory to identify other Apo Island-like islands and replicate the marine reserve project to be managed by the islands' communities.

The committee's efforts don't stop there. "We want to organize several galas across Filipinos in the United States to become lead leaders of the Shedd Aquarium exhibit to make them more conscious of their Philippine heritage," Jean added.

Silliman University President Dr. Agustin Pedro Jugal officer of the Philippine Reef Gala Committee. "The Filipinos there have been shown as that they are also sensitive to the needs of the people here," he said.

He also hailed the perseverance of the people of Apo Island, saying that "because of their accomplishments, they have proven that "there is a future in tourism and in preserving our marine resources."

'Why not R-10 or C-3 for Diokno?'

By Lira B. Salonoy

WHY NOT name other "name-less" roads after Sen. Jose W. Diokno and leave Taft Avenue alone?

That was the suggestion of Manila Mayor Jocelyn Atienza, Jr., who said yesterday that he was even ready to go to Malacañang to oppose the controversial proposal to rename Taft Avenue in Manila after Diokno.

Atienza, in an interview over dzBB, said there were many "homeless" major roads that could take the renamed nationalist's name, like the R-10 road that passes through Tondo in Manila and the C-3 road in North Fairview in Quezon City.

He added that the naming of the liberals avenue after Governor General William Howard Taft was done as a tribute to him for his contributions to the city of Manila. Atienza said changing the avenue's name could be deemed an affront to many people.

Senate Bill 2001 to rename Taft Avenue to Jose W. Diokno Avenue was sponsored by Sen. Ramon Revilla Jr. to be up for approval.

The measure is based on a House bill sponsored by Reps. Jose Miguel Zubiri (Bukidnon) and Apolinario Lozada (Negros Occidental).

Senate President Franklin Drilon also revealed over dzBB that most of the pending bills in the Senate prevalent to the resuming of trade.

Atienza also expressed frustration yesterday at the lawmakers' lack of consideration with the local government and the city's executive branch since the bill was proposed.

"[The lack of consultation] is contrary to law and to good practice," he said. Both Drilon and Lacuna are not from Manila.

And as Manila Representative, Harry Angping, said yesterday that if his colleagues want to honor Diokno, there are other ways we do so without renaming Taft Avenue after him.

Angping said he also said that changing the name of the well-known Taft Avenue would only cause confusion among commerce and motorists.

'Slight increase' in accidents noted on faster roads

By Tarra Quismundo

A "SLIGHT increase" is how Metropolitan Manila Development Authority Chair Bayani Fernando described the latest MMDA statistics on traffic accidents on Metro Manila's main thoroughfares.

"There was no almost negligible increase in most roadways where we implemented 5-unit-class or clearways," said Fernando.

From 126 accidents registered between August and October 2003, 134 traffic accidents were registered in the same period last year. An increase of eight cases.

Of this number, some were killed, and nearly involved damage to vehicles.

U-turn slots were built along the thoroughfares as part of the clearway system being implemented by the MMDA.

In the scheme, intersections were closed and U-turn slots were carved out to allow continuously moving traffic.

And for Fernando, the statistics left of the carnage of the 12 U-turn slots he had placed along Metro Manila's roads.

"The travelling speed in these roads almost doubled, but there is almost no increase in accidents," Fernando said.

He added that the measures seemed "less some," while policy-makers were "more cautious," with the installation of the U-turn slots.

Fernando said the occasional road accidents could be further reduced, when the installation of footbridges around Metro Manila is finished.

The MMDA, said Fernando, identified 91 areas where footbridges should be installed to provide safe crossing for pedestrians.

Work is currently in progress on 14 footbridges in several points in Metro Manila, among which are Coastal Road and Quezon Avenue.

Fernando said this first batch of footbridges would be finished by the middle of February.

MMDA hit over renewed tree cutting

THE WAIT
Two boys look out of the shell of what used to be their house at the Bacoor compound in Manila, which was hit by a big fire on Jan. 11.

By Tina Santos and Margaux Ortiz

GOVERNOR'S ISLAND: Alarmed Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) Chair Bayani Fernando asked for removing trees and vines on Kalayaan Avenue over the weekend—an occasion which the officials subsequently denied.

According to Inter Press Service Tagle, founder of Concerned Citizens Against Pollution (Concapi), at least 11 trees, including saplings, were removed by the MMDA men on Saturday night.

Fernando has long been criticized by various ecology-friendly groups, including Concap, for removing road islands and trees to discourage traffic in the area.

On Tagle said they were told that the latest move was meant to give way for the construction of a U-turn slot on the area.

But Dr. Tagle protested that Fernando's latest order violated a recent agreement he had with Concap.

Fernando had agreed that he would not touch the trees pending the resolution of the case filed before the Quezon City Regional Trial Court, Dr. Tagle said.

She added that the MMDA chair had asked them not to file a petition for injunction as he promised that he would not conduct any road-widening activity in the area.

Dr. Tagle further claimed that in a previous meeting with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) where he conferred with a technical working group for a long-term solution on the issue, he learned that only one island would be removed.

But the MMDA chair said so much tree cutting was done.

"We have not touched any tree on Kalayaan," Fernando told the reporters.

He, however, admitted that his men have been coordinating there U-turn slots on the avenue in front of the Ayalaco de Manila Compound and Bonifacio College.

Fernando said Dr. Tagle could be referring to shrubbery which had to be removed to give way to the U-turn slots.

Anti-crime group exposes 'textortion'

By Lolgie del Puerto

ESPAP for reasons groups are denouncing families of Filipino-Chinese with kidnapping through text messages, a citizens group has revealed.

Teresita Ang-See, spokesperson of the Citizens Action Against Crime and the Movement for the Restoration of Peace and Order, said at least seven families had received kidnapping threats using the popular technology.

Some of the threats turned out to be mere harassment, but others were meant to extort, drug, be sold.

She advised the public to ignore threats made through text messaging, or report them to the police.

In any case, she said, a pay-off eventually took place after negotiations done over the cell phone.

Recently, the police arrested a Jose Maci Agcaoili in an extortion operation at the fishmarket's toilet in Navotas City, she said.

Agcaoili had threatened a 38-year-old Chinese trader with kidnapping unless he paid P5 million.

Dad blasts Fresnedi over terminal

By Margaux Ortiz

MUNTINLUPA CITY: Councilor Rene Carl Capricho has filed a complaint before the Office of the Ombudsman against Mayor Aimee Fresnedi for allegedly real-filing illegal terminal operators.

"I questioned the mayor on granting the operation of this terminal without the required accreditation," Capricho said, referring to the terminal beside the one operated by Ayoma near the Alabang market.

"I further inquired about the collection of fees from that terminal, which amounts to P6,000 daily, without an ordinance allowing it," he added.

In a public hearing of the city council's committee on transportation and communication, Muntinlupa traffic chief Abraham Medez reportedly admitted that the mayor gave him specific instructions to allow the operation of the terminal.

Medez, who reportedly confirmed that P4,000 was being collected daily from its operation.

Capricho said in a phone interview that he wants the mayor about this but the issue alleged that it has anything to do with politics.

"It's easy to get a permit and an accreditation, why haven't they done that?" Capricho said.

The councilor stressed that "illegal terminals were sources of corruption," which was why these should be looked into.

Fresnedi, however, allowing the operation of the terminal, but said it was a "temporary solution" to a problem plaguing drivers of public utility vehicles.

He said members of the local legislative council were sent to him and complained of the high fees allegedly being charged by Ayoma, the legitimate terminal operator, for the use of their facilities.

Hence, Fresnedi said, prompted him to allow the jeepney drivers to use the adjacent lot for a daily P6,000 fee paid directly to the city treasurer, the mayor pointed out.

With Joyce Ubaldo

You can make the needles go away for Hyla

By Mary Jocelyn Uy

FOR HAZELEA Mae, hope lingers even amid despair.

Rudolph's 8-year-old daughter, Hyla, has been diagnosed with Acute Myelogenous Leukemia (AML).

Since May 2002, Hyla's tumultuous battle up at the San Pedro Hospital in Davao City has become part of her way of life.

But the trips to Davao City from Cotabato City, where the family resides, have become tiresome for mother and daughter.

"I could no longer bear seeing her servers in pain due to frequent pricking of needles. I am afraid that she would suffer a relapse," Hazelea wrote in a letter left to the doctors.

Dr. Lilia Tee, Hyla's physician, advised the family that she undergo a Bone Marrow Transplant (BMT).

But a BMT costs P2 million to P3 million and their financial resources have already been drained by Hyla's chemotherapy and antibiotics, which amount to P80,000 a month. Hazelea knew a BMT was impossible.

But when she read the article on "Bone marrow transplant survivors, life keep birth," which appeared on Inquirer's front page on Jan. 13, Hazelea saw a flicker of hope.

The story was about 10-year-old Nicole Figueroa, who won the very first BMT patient at the Asian Hospital.

Hazelea believes that her daughter, like Nicole Figueroa, would survive AML with the help of virtual-hearted readers.

Interested donors may reach the family at the Cotabato City Sub-District Engineering Office, 12 RDS Compound, Awang (606) in Maguindanao.

They may be contacted at cell phone numbers 0919-5836307 and 0920-6046154.

Donations can also be deposited in the account of Hazelea Mahilong (Account no. 2163-0001-08, Bank of the Philippine Islands, Cotabato City).

Cheap fuel for buses negotiated

By Tina Santos

PUBLIC utility bus operators may soon also enjoy discounts on diesel, which is being enjoyed by jeepney drivers and operators.

This was disclosed by Metro Urban Bautista, chair of the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB), saying they were finalizing plans of allowing bus operators to avail of diesel at P33.68 per liter.

Bautista, in a phone interview, said talks among the LTFRB, the Department of Energy and several bus operators had been ongoing since last week.

Some oil companies have reportedly agreed to the proposal, which aims to stop bus operators from seeking a fare hike.

Several oil companies has

METRO

E-mail: [illegible]
Editor Alekandra S. Villaroy

Marikina execs plead to retain hospital budget

By Luige del Puerro

MARIKINA City councilors are set to issue an appeal to the Department of Health to reconsider its decision to cut the operational budget of a major city hospital by as much as 50 percent.

The City Council tomorrow will send a resolution appealing to health officials to stop the budget measure which would slash P18 million from the budget of the Amang Rodriguez Medical Center, according to Councilor Fabian Cadiz.

At least 60 percent of the AMRC's patients come from Marikina City. The rest are from Rizal and neighboring cities. Around 70 percent of the patients are poor, said Cadiz, who is also authored the.

The councilor said the budget slash is ill-timed, just when the hospital is beginning to be known as a "first-rate hospital for the poor."

Cadiz said he has learned that the DOH is pushing through with the cut—confident that AMRC could survive with no earnings.

The DOH is cutting AMRC's budget to help raise P124 million as counterpart fund for the French financed Project.

Under the agreement, AMRC would get top-of-the-line hospital equipment worth P216 million from France.

The hospital has received two dozen set of equipment since 1997.

Alexander Padilla, DOH undersecretary and head of the bids and awards committee, said the hospital would not be dropped just like that.

"We will tell AMRC whenever necessary," Padilla said. "We have also calculated that it's savings would be enough. They just have to tighten their belt."

Padilla added that the difficulties would be felt only this year.

By next year, AMRC's budget would be restored, he said.

WATER CRISIS

Desalination plant tapped for Metro

RESIDENTS of Tondo, Manila wait in line to fill their drums and buckets with water that has of late turned into a precious commodity. AFP

By Veh Contreras

THE PRESIDING road to keep Metro Manila from drying up has found another way to consider a technology exploited to the hilt in desert countries.

An idle desalination facility will be reactivated next month to augment water supply to the metropolis and help cushion the impact of the looming water crisis, according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

DENR officials yesterday admitted that the reduced rainfall—brought about by the government's cloud-seeding operations—over the August Dam in Bulacan, have not significantly raised the water level at the reservoir.

The National Water Resources Board yesterday reported that the August's water line has dropped to 197.24 meters, or 8.37 meters below the lowest rule curve, or what is considered the "minimum comfort level."

A week ago, the water line stood at 199.06 meters.

The water level will reach "critical" status once it slips below the 188 meter mark, said NWRB Executive Director Benny Abikan.

The desalination facility, operated by the Metro Rock Inc. within the National Power Corp. plant in Navat, Pantabangan, is expected to produce 4,000 cubic meters of treated water daily once operational, according to Environment Secretary Elisea Gozun.

The DENR chief said that the water generated from the new source will not mean any increase in the water bills of ordinary households, since water consumption from the MWSS facility will be sold "in bulk" to malls, hotels and condominiums.

"It's a business-to-business arrangement, so no cost to the government," Gozun said in a media briefing.

The desalination facility operated by the same company that treats the water supply in Cebu, was decommissioned four years ago.

The DENR has made representations with the MWSS management, which may need from P7 million to P8 million to make the plant operational within two weeks, Gozun said.

Abikan said the desalination facility was formerly used by taxpayer for pouring water used for the flame power plant's cooling system.

DENR officials are also exploring the possibility of tapping Bataan "spring water" and transporting it to Manila.

Officials are also hoping to resist deep wells in at least four cities in Metro Manila.

The wells were put up to cope with the drought caused by the El Niño phenomenon last decade.

Water board: No cut in Metro Manila water supply

By Tito Samua

THE NATIONAL Water Resources Board yesterday announced that it would "not go hard" its initial plan to cut by another 5 percent the volume of water being supplied to Metro Manila.

The reduction in water supply was supposed to be implemented on Feb. 1.

During a radio interview, MWSS Director Ramon Alikpala said that they have decided not to push through with the cutback in remember the number of residents affected by the water shortage.

The MWSS has already cut by 5 percent the water supply in Metro Manila, and by 10 percent the irrigation water for Central Luzon farmlands.

The 5 percent cutback in supply affected at least 800,000 people in the metropolis.

Officials are expecting a water crisis in the metropolis this summer.

They cited the shortage in rainfall, which caused the water line at the dam in Dingalan to drop to a critical level.

"If we just down the water supply by another 5 percent, the number of affected people would double, and we don't want that to happen," Alikpala said.

But the MWSS official said that with the supply in Metro Manila as is, they would be forced to reduce the water allocated for farmers in Central Luzon.

Alikpala said Metro Manila households are their "priority right now."

Alikpala earlier said that although the government's cloud-seeding operations to induce rain proved to be successful, the water level at the reservoir in Bulacan remains perilously low, saying it would take at least 45 days before the water level at the dam's new.

Fernando: Mark People Power anywhere but on Edsa

By Tarra Quismundo

IF IT were up to Bayani Fernando, Edsa shrine never see another people power celebration.

Fernando, chair of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, yesterday said that he would suggest to President Macapagal-Arroyo to mark the 1986 Edsa Revolution anywhere but on the historic highway.

"I will advise the President not to hold rallies on Edsa," Fernando yesterday told reporters in a press conference.

In February, the nation will mark the 18th anniversary of the bloodless revolution that led to the ouster of former President Ferdinand Marcos.

The People Power anniversary is held yearly at the Edsa Shrine, drawing tens of thousands of people to the memorial site on Edsa and Ortigas Avenue.

But for Fernando, such a gathering would cause massive traffic along the highway, affecting other mass thoroughfares.

"We do not have another road to hold the (relocated) traffic that would be displaced from Edsa," Fernando said. "We should move from Edsa."

Instead, Fernando said that the anniversary rites could be held on White Plains Avenue, the road parallel to Ortigas Avenue leading to Cubao in Quezon City.

At the intersection of White Plains Ave. and Edsa is the People Power Monument.

According to Fernando, the area would be a better venue for the Edsa commemoration, since the road is set-down road.

The People Power commemoration on Edsa is just one of the many public assemblies the MMDA would want to ban in Metro Manila's thoroughfares.

Fernando said that there is a measure against the holding of kamikazes, fun runs, walkathons, rallies, public meetings and political rites on major roads.

Fernando said that they would not rule out critical roads such as Taft, Claro M. Recto, Commonwealth and Quezon Avenues, España Boulevard, Buencamino Highway, Southeast Highway and C-5 road would be free of public gatherings.

While permits for assemblies are obtained from local government units, Fernando said that those who would like to hold such gatherings should likewise secure approval from the MMDA.

He said that the LGUs may not be aware of what events going on in the area.

He added that the policy would be implemented to prevent opposing political parties to hold their programs at the same time.

Permit-applications must be submitted to the MMDA a week before the event.

MMDA Traffic Director Angelito Singal de Dios said that they would need at least a week to plan a traffic management scheme for the event.

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Titled players fan chess revolt

By Roy Luarca and Marc Anthony Reyes

TAKING up the cause of Grandmasters Joey Antonio and Irene Villamayor, the Philippine Chess Masters Association now threatens mass unSTAMEY Endino, secretary general of the National Chess Federation of the Philippines.

The organization of the country's titled players yesterday filed a petition calling for the ouster of Endino as NCFP secretary general for, among others, alleged financial mismanagement and malfeasance.

Aside from Antonio, Villamayor and PCMA head Bill Quinto Saguid, a former NCFP head, the association include International Masters Chito Garma, the PCMA vice president, IM Arnold Jubilo, IM Ferdinand Arca, IM Domingo Ramos, IM Ruffy Sadiarin and IM Enrique Paniwizan.

Aside from "neglecting the needs of chess masters by failing to regularly organize tournaments," the group alleges criminal hiding of failing to award the cash prizes for the 2003 inter-zone champion ship to some members of the winning teams.

They also claimed that the allowances from the Philippine Sports Commission for the team's and women's teams in the 36th Olympiad in 2002 and the 2003 World Youth Championships in Greece were not given and the Fide ratings of Philippine team members were withheld by the World Chess Federation (FIDE) because the NCFP didn't pay to dues in time.

Other signatories were women Fide Grantee Marlene and Jan Lotilbes, Fide Masters Adrian Paris and Manny Gonzalez and FIDA Edgardo Gomez, then Milagrosa Darwin Lazo, Bob Jones Liwagan, Winston Joseph Silva, Kelly Martinez, Mardonio Magpo, Ronald Udtohan, Ronald Mohr, Jesus Bales and Dante Zuniga.

But Endino expressed doubts on the authenticity of the signatures, adding the accusations against him were re hashed issues.

"I have my doubts on the signatures, and the alleged accusations were the same accusations that have been settled last year," said Endino.

The embattled chess official said the complaints by the players were already resolved during an executive committee meeting last year attended by NCFP president lawyer Wilcon Belleza, Vice honorary president Florante Campomanes, Antonio and GM Eugene Torre.

Antonio and Villamayor have already resigned as members of the NCFP playing council in the wake of the the proposed PCA million suit on one showdown pitting Torre against 15-year-old IM Mark Paragua, currently the country's top-ranked player.

Former Sen. reportedly denied involvement in the Torre-Paragua duel.

Antonio also claimed that the NCFP hardly meets to discuss its programs much less launch a training strategy for its players. He added that the Olympiad can earn each cyber only at the airport on the day of their departure for Viet nam.

PASSENGER: Hot favorite

DHL Open blasts off today

WITH an early morning flight, Ako Bond should get the momentum he needs to start his title retention bid on a bright note in the ninth DHL-NSAP Amateur Open Golf Championship which blasts off today (Tuesday) at the north course of the Celebrang golf complex in Laguna.

Ranged against Mizuno-DHL Maven Inc. member, Ako Jun Ehara of Southwoods and veteran campaigner Tommy Manotoc in the first flight at 6 a.m., Bond, who beat Jarvi Pagunsan by five events last year, hopes to take full advantage of the expert's ahead planning conditions and churn out a low score before the dreaded winds of Carolinapo could come into play.

Pagunsan, installed as the top bet have to the absence of two-time national champion Jerome Delacruz, who has joined the pro ranks, likewise drew a good lot of 6:27 a.m. with the former SEA Games champion playing with Southwood Gene Bondoc, RP Lopez of Mizuno-DHL and Del Monte's Louie Gonzales.

Gracing the opening of the prestigious event are DHL Express country manager Charles Browne and NSAP president Bal Feliciano, who will hit the ceremonial drive at 7:30 a.m. along with Jose Feliciano, president of PPPP Express. PCSO vice president Vice Admiral Lucito Bernardo, Cavgolf executive director Luigi Yulo and Cavgolf president Atty. Severino Yulo.

No way but up for TJ Hotdogs

FROM whom Purefoods ate, there's no other way but up.

And with all the changes in their lineup, the Boxkings are due for a big turnaround from an awful campaign last season.

Purefoods first acquired Jim Limpot and Eddie Laure through blockbuster trades then Jose Nitz Simon came aboard from the free-agency pool. The arrivals of James Yap, Mike Hrabe and Paul Asi Taulava in the annual draft marcher finally completed the installation of new blood.

Add them to old teammates Alvin Patrimonio, Bobby Jacobson, Rey Evangelista, Noy Castillo, Jeset Fernandez and Richard Yee and what have you got?

"The old Purefoods team is back," said Purefoods coach Ilgin Gregorio, now upbeat of his chances for a big PBA coup after the major overhaul of the Hardage lineup.

"This is now an entirely different team, one which could match up with any team on any given night," Gregorio added.

The acquisition of Limpot in exchange for draft Bright has given Gregorio a go-to guy in the post who could attract double-teaming defense and, in the process, free up the shooters. Limpot averaged 11.3 points, 5.3 rebounds and 1.1 assists for Barangay Ginebra last season.

"We don't have a player who has to be double-teamed in our old lineup," Gregorio said.

"Simon is a steal," Gregorio said of the Rain Or Shine standout, who is an MVP contender in the current PBL tourney where he is the league's top shooter.

How about Uli's prolific tandem of Yap and Asiado? "No question about it, they're big additions to the team," said Gregorio.

The Hotdogs are coming off their worst season in 16 years, chalking up only nine wins against 27 defeats that included a club record 12-straight setbacks.

But with a rejuvenated roster, Purefoods coach allied to say down: June Mercado

Shell faces Ginebra in PBA Fiesta opener

By June Navarro

IT WILL get a glimpse of its future when the Turbochargers tangle with the Gasoline Boys on Feb. 22 in the inaugural match of the PBA Fiesta Conference at the Araneta Coliseum.

Focus will be on Rich Alvarez, this year's top draft pick, who will lined up for Turbochargers' coach Yeng Guiao and Antonio John Mecate, who has taken over as coach from the resigned Perry Ronquillo.

The 6-foot-9 Alvarez, a tough defender and potent rebounder from Ateneo, will take battle with new acquisitions 6-foot-8 Billy Mamaril from Purefoods and 6-foot Carlo Sharma, a former low post rival from De La Salle, in battling the Kings' Tim Meeks, Rommel Adducul and Andy Seigle under the glass.

The 6-5 Seigle was acquired from Purefoods in a trade with Zamboanga.

A two-hour opening ceremony ushering in the PBA's 28th season will precede the Shell-Ginebra tilt.

Meanwhile, referee Opie Bernardo will ask the PBA to reconsider its decision not to renew his contract.

"I've been having sleepless nights since the PBA notified me about its decision. My family will definitely suffer now that I am jobless," said Bernardo, 39, whose wife is suffering from thyroid cancer.

PBA Commissioner Noli Eala announced Bernardo's services last Jan. 15 but the referee said no reason was given for the non-renewal of his contract.

Bernardo said that he won't object if he is not reinstated as long as he gets his award as referee of the year for the 2003 season.

The PBA Pressmen currently voted Bernardo, who has been with the PBA for 10 years, as its referee of the Year.

A father of four, Bernardo is also bothered by love problems, one of the reasons, he suspects, his contract has not renewed.

MVP race as tight as PBL title tiff

JUST like the title series between Welcoat Paints and Pasig Liquid Laundry Detergent, the race for the coveted MVP award in the PBL Philippine Cup promises to be tight and exciting among some of the top finalists.

Based on statistics, six Welcoat players led by the high-leaping Jojo Tangkay, are among the frontrunners for the conference's highest individual award while Pasig has three mainstays in the mix.

The lone outsider is skier Congress of Basilan UBC, who is ranked eighth overall. Only the players in the top 10 are eligible for the MVP award.

The statistical points considers two-thirds of the final total of the MVP candidates with the remaining one-third coming from the players and media voters. Voting will start in Game 1 of the title series slated Thursday at the Makati Coliseum and ends in Game 2 at the San Juan gym.

The MVP winner, the members of the Mythical Five and several teams and awardees will be honored before the start of Game 3, set Tuesday next week at the Ynares Sports Complex.

Riding high on his solid all-around show for the ceiling, the 28-year-old Tangkay has collected a total of 648 statistical points after the series, just 149 points ahead of his celebrated teammate James Yap.

Forty bests, the 6-foot-7 center of Welcoat, is third with 624 followed by Bash Allan Salangsang (606) and Peter Jose Simon (579).

The 6-foot Simon has emerged as the top scorer with an average of 16.07 points per game.

Welcoat's defensive specialist, Dallas Wilson, is sixth with 604, three points up on today's Rich Kid source, the top pick in the recent PBA draft, who remains a hot MVP candidate.

Abet Guanzon (542) comes Welcoat's roster), Marc Pingris (512), and Red Ismail (511).

SPORTSWATCH

Archers down archrivals Eagles

LA SALLE's undefeated archers sprinted to a 70-point halftime lead and then held off a furious rally by archrival Ateneo to win 84-82 last Saturday in the Fred Hall-sponsored UAAP Inter-Intercollegiate Tournament at the Greenhills Sports Complex in San Juan.

Jeepers Cuan, last year's MVP middle of the year, knocked in 20 points to power the Archers to their fourth win in five games and keep the 40 team record unspoiled. Impressive Archers' Center Ping Viernes also had a good day as he had 17 points and 11 rebounds, while Archer Jeff Del Rio had 15 points.

The setback was the fourth in five games for the Eagles. Reigning UAAP champion De La Salle University opened last Saturday's Ateneo vs. Ateneo game with a 7-0 run to open the game. SEAG A-list Lemondad San Miguel Beermen (5-2) defeated Ateneo de Manila University and University of the Philippines (6-0) and University of Santo Tomas Unified National University (7-0) in other games on Jan. 21 at the Rizal gym with The Paper facing PCU (4-3) vs. Letran meeting Mapua at 1 p.m., La Salle playing PCU (4-3) at 3:30 and FEU battling San Sebastian at 5.

Pia's Heritage Run set Jan. 31

THE MANILA 2014 Marathoning Pinoy opens its 2004 season on Jan. 31 with a run in honor of the 200th death of the inaugural Manila Governor, Miguel de Legazpi. To be dubbed the The Journey of the Pia Foundation One of the official runs of the old town, the Pia museum houses Chinese pottery and other archeological finds that date back to several centuries ago. Pia is also home to several ancestral houses. Officials of the Manila Runners and Sports Promotions will launch the activities for the Pia Historical Society Foundation after which is known as the Pia Heritage Run, a yearly event designed to showcase the information on the town's value as a heritage site. "It is truly an honor to celebrate, even in our own little way, to the preservation of culture in Pia. which remains one of the best kept secrets of Laguna," said Helmut Manuntag of Janet Promotions and Organizers of Pinoy Toothpaste.

Group lobbies for arms inclusion in SEAG

THE PHILIPPINE Olympic Committee was criticized for either deciding what sports is available in the Philippine Southeast Asian Games or for not funding said sport. The Philippine Indigenous Games and Sports Development Inc. (PIGSDI), which was founded in 1988 by Jose Dino Cruz, is lobbying for archery, among others, to be included in the biennial meet. Cruz said he would seek the help of sports officials, particularly the Philippine Sports Commission and the POC, for archery to be part of the national games, to be included as either regular or demonstration sport in the 2005 SEA Games calendar. "Maganda sana na mainisa ang archery sa 2005 SEA Games," said Cruz. "Marami ngang atleta na nanalo sa ibang laro."

Miriam boosters make it 5 in a row

MIRIAM College won some and Saturday and remained half a game ahead of defending elementary champion College San Agustin in the 2003 Metro Basketball Conference (MBC) at the St. Benedict College gymnasium in Antipolo City. Miriam's Abigail Lumagui (MVP) and the St. Benedict College cagers

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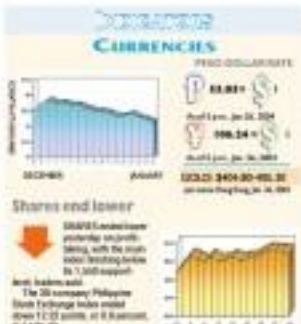
ASSOCIATED COMPUTER SYSTEMS, INC.

Peso plunges to new low of 55.85 to $1



By Cielnas S. Bunao

THE PESO yesterday plunged to a new all-time low of 55.85 to $1, beating Friday's close of 55.75, on waning investor confidence and increasing market jitters in the runup to the May elections.

As to whether or not there would be an election also caused anxiety in the financial market, according to traders and government officials.

The peso opened weak at 55.75 against the greenback and dropped to 55.85 in the afternoon trade. Turnover reached $91.1 million, of which $35.825 million was reportedly sold by the central bank.

"Since the peso breaches 55.80, it would be easier to push it down. The 56.81 level won't be our last stand but it would depend on what position the central bank would take," said a treasury official from a foreign bank.

Yesterday's close matched the all-time, intra-day trading low of 55.85 posted on Nov. 27, a day after Pentagon Pvt. Jr. announced his candidacy, although the peso managed to close at 55.69 to a dollar that day.

BSP Deputy Governor Armando Ibitayo Jr. said the central bank stayed away from the market. "But we are watching it closely," he stressed.

Ibitayo's comment was that no government intervention was necessary to support the peso's value.

Traders said the central bank would arrest the peso's decline by exerting its influence over the spot market either by selling dollars or using moral suasion to prevent banks from artificially worsening demand.

"We would not use interest rates or any of our monetary tools to address the peso's weakness. This is a political problem and not economic," Ibitayo said.

Including recent pointing to a no-election scenario had been hunting fifties, he said. A trader, on the other hand, said that the decision of The Commission on Elections not to disqualify Senator Fox Jr. made investors uneasy.

In the past, the BSP either

(TURN TO P. B2)

IMF warns gov't of risks of huge public debt

THE INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund has warned Philippine officials of "rising vulnerabilities" in the economy for which caused by an unsustainable level of public debt.

The IMF vowed to keep a close watch on the country especially as uncertainties in the runup to the coming elections continued to rake its toll on financial markets.

The IMF's Executive Board held informal discussions last Dec. 10 on the progress in carrying out macroeconomic policies in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Iraq, Turkmenistan, West Bank and Gaza, and Turkey.

Key officials like the finance secretary and the central bank governor were informed of the results of the IMF Board discussion.

During the informal meeting, the Fund acknowledged the increasing vulnerabilities in the Philippines "and the need for bold actions to address them," according to a source.

The IMF believed that "a further increase in public indebtedness is inevitable, adversely affecting debt sustainability." The Fund estimated a large public sector financing requirement this year.

Aside from the usual attention given to the country's precarious fiscal situation particularly during an election year when important reforms are expected to stay idle in Congress, the Fund also noted "significant weaknesses in the banking and payment system."

"The magnitude of non-performing loans remains high and there has been insufficient progress in resolving problem banks. The payment sector continues to be weak and the pace of concrete reform is slow," according to an IMF informal communication.

The Fund recognized the positive developments last year such as the economic growth of about 4 percent, an inflation rate of about 3 percent, and the budget deficit within the PHP 146 billion target. However, it said the export sector's performance was disappointing.

But despite the generally unfavorable performances, the Fund said the peso traded at new lows as sovereign bond spreads widened and local interest rates rose due to adverse political developments.

While the government shared the concern on the "rising vulnerabilities," it told the IMF that nothing much by way of legislative reforms could be done at the outset of the elections.

But authorities promised the IMF that they would keep a tight rein on the budget deficit and "resist pressures for pro-election spending."

Statements made by President Macapagal expressing concern on the country's high level of public debt and the need to enforce fiscal discipline was considered reassuring.

(TURN TO P. B2)

The plot chicken

BREAKTIME

Conrado R. Bonsol III

Chicken, in short, is the crucial item. That data-rare administration of Ulomarita is allowing chicken importation. I said importation—not smuggling.

Now somebody spread rumors—among, of course—abuse-inspired chicken. The rumors did not help unruly food prices. Who threw a plot somewhere?

***

DOH's banking system is not exactly in the pink of health. We all know it. What we do not know is whether we can still count on the important people in charge for banks.

Take that thing called the "bank guarantee." Instinct stirs to go around about how a bank guarantee today is just as good as the "guaranteeing" from the National Archives.

The fallacies: the PHA and Manilabank League itself is losing chunks from continuing Manilabank to honor to so-called "irrevocable" guarantee.

The bank issued the guarantees to the PHA, as part of the contract with the government as from NRO-4 and DBC-21 to tolerate the garbage.

The PHA awarded the contract to the cheaper system, precisely on the strength of the Manilabank "irrevocable" guarantee.

A few months later, Manilabank told the PHA that, actually, the guarantee was a "conditional" one. Nobody knows why the bank suddenly changed the contract text, amended to disclose that it was "conditional."

***

INNOVATE is the pending legal battle between the PHA and Manilabank is a huge amount, about P324 million, which is what the PHA should collect from the government stations.

The bank said the PHA that, instead, the guarantee is "valid," only it is "cooperative." Whaat? The guarantee has no "cooperative validity," is that it?

This is a simple case, according to the PHA, because it feels that it has nothing to do with the arrangement between the bank and the government stations.

The league got an irrevocable guarantee from Manilabank, period. Since the bank does not honor it, PHA goes by court and, again, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, enforcement point.

HOWEVER, of course, can be certain about a possible controversy between certain people in Manilabank and in the government stations, although it's clear that the PHA supports.

It does happen, though. Bank personnel sometimes get involved in deals in which their clients defraud other people. Such complaints even reach the Bangko Sentral.

One thing I know. Bangko Sentral officials recently summoned the officers of a thrift bank, which allegedly also did not want to honor a similar "guarantee."

Filing the complaint with the Bangko Sentral was Quincio Paredes from Diego, a realtor and developer, who here property-committee developer named Orlando Marcello.

The bank is Real Bank, a thrift bank in Quezon City, whose chair and president is Jose Marcello, the former senior partner of the Promulgation & Marcello accounting firm, which also happens to be the external auditor of the bank. Whoa!

The Bangko General has ordered Real Bank to immediately answer the charges of San Diego. As far, from what I hear, the Bangko General is still waiting.

***

SMC Diego's story goes something like this.

The other developer, meaning Marcello, borrowed money from him, the bill the money, and this time issued liabilities on the strength of the guarantee from Real Bank.

The bank, however, refused to honor P51 million, which the bank guaranteed. The loan was repaid. In other words, it had the ingredients of the classic "Klop."

A little later, you see, the new loan already amounted to P1.8 million, supported by the same guarantee from the same bank as in the earlier transaction.

Surprise! When the borrower failed to meet the payments, the bank also refused to honor the guarantee, claiming it was "unauthorized."

So, rather than Diego filed a complaint with the Bangko Sentral, representatives of the bank replied on the interest of the settlement, but they asked for time, which the bank provided subsequently disowned.

But then San Diego also complained to the Bangko Sentral that, actually, the bank and the borrowing real estate company were virtually one and the same group.

San Diego claimed that, under an agreement, the bank has taken over the real estate company.

Which, as he saw it, money going out of the company would be a setback to the bank, including the payment of the loan from him. See what I mean?

Smart inks $117-M supply contract with Nokia Networks

By Abigail L. Ho

SMART Communications Inc. signed a $117-million supply contract with Finnish equipment provider Nokia Networks.

The company said in a statement yesterday that the new agreement was intended for the expansion and enhancement of its global system for mobile communication (GSM) network.

With the new contract, Smart said it would continue rolling out more mobile-data services under its enhanced data rates for GSM evolution (EDGE) network, a path-way to third generation (3G) technology.

"We want to provide our growing subscriber base more efficiently. These investments will address our objectives on capacity expansion, preparation for 3G over platforms, introduction of multi-media technologies as well as continuing service quality improvements," Smart administration and materials management division head Ramon Bernardo said.

Smart wireless penetration rate now exceeding expectations at around 25 percent as of end-2003, mobile phone operators need to continually enhance their networks to boost usage as well as lure more subscribers.

Also, as the most urbanized area in the country in terms of wireless penetration, cellular service providers are now leveraging their presence on the more untapped hinterlands to woo markets.

These markets include the broad C and D income brackets, to which most prepaid cellular subscribers belong. Currently, subscribers account for more than 90 percent of the country's total subscriber base.

"The enhancement of Smart's network will enable us to offer more personalized and more diversified wireless services to our subscribers. This will also help us expand our network to more remote areas and to foray into new technologies," Smart's network services head Rolando Fidel said.

Smart has, as of end-2003, more than 13 million subscribers all over the country. Its closest competitor, Globe, serves some seven approximately 30 percent of the population.

Mocha Blends to put up ₱300-M roasting plant

By Michelle V Ramos

COFFEE retailer Mocha Blends Philippines is set to increase production to establish a coffee-roasting plant in Cavite.

Mocha Blends president Vicente de la Cruz said the coffee-roasting facility would supply the ingredients needed by the company's soon-to-open coffee shops abroad.

The company currently has around 16 outlets in coffee shops in Shanghai, China and Manila (airport, Malaysia within the first semester of the year. De la Cruz said company representatives recently held discussions with possible business partners in the said countries for the establishment of its coffee shops.

The company official said Mocha Blends is finalizing partnership negotiations with Oyster trading and manufacturing Sim Seah Industrial Corp. for the Shanghai project. As to Manila Lumpur operations, Mocha Blends is finalizing talks with a Malaysian investor.

The coffee-roasting facility in Cavite, De la Cruz said, would be established in partnership with its Australian investor Manila Coffee Pty Ltd.

Mocha Coffee branding director Fred Mercado, who was in the country early this month, said Mocha blends was expected to gain patronage among Malaysian and Chinese locals because of its efficiency in franchising.

"I am surprised that Filipinos are more efficient in maintaining the same quality of their products and services in different areas. We hope the company maintains its franchising skills as it gets bigger through the years," Mercado said.

FIRST IN 6 YEARS

PNB posts ₱168M in profit

By Doris C. Dumlao

PHILIPPINE National Bank ended five years of financial bleeding by posting a net income of about P168 million in 2003.

This was a sharp turnaround from the P1.61 billion net loss it registered in 2002.

PNB yesterday said its return to profitability—three years ahead of the target under its rehabilitation program—was made possible by the huge improvements in net interest margin, fee-based income and operating expense management.

Based on the bank's unaudited financial results, net interest income jumped to P1.64 billion in 2003 from only P609 million a year ago. This was fueled by higher interest income and lower interest expense.

Interest income increased to P7.26 billion from P6.41 billion, while interest expense slid to 4% 5 billion from P6.3 billion.

"The higher net margin was brought about by the bank's active campaign to expand its low-cost deposit base and by aligning the pricing of loans and deposits to market levels," PNB said.

It added that collection of certain past due accounts also contributed substantially to the improved margins.

Meanwhile, the bank said its return to profitability was achieved after PNB painted the "blood-bath-and-bank" strategy that gave it some headaches this morning, now continues to tap new markets and expand the bank's business even pursued while standing down its non-performing assets in the face of volatile markets.

The bank also raised more low-cost funds by launching new products for high networth clients and overseas Filipino workers.

Fee-based and other income increased by P395 million to P4.81 billion as the bank enhanced its service fees and other charges.

For 2004, PNB hopes to do even better as it continues to vigorously pursue the incremental initiatives under the Good Bank-Bad Bank strategy," it said.

IMF warns gov't of risks . . .

Continued from B1

The IMF was reportedly encouraged by the commitment of the local authorities but it expected that "will no progress for Gaudiosa real reform in the near term, the vulnerabilities are likely to remain."

The IMF said it intended to monitor developments closely according to a source, particularly in the conduct of the extended post-program monitoring (PPM) arrangement.

Despite the concerns raised by the IMF in its recent meeting, the Fund staff that conducted the review of the economy in November said that it had increased its 4.2% projection for the economy's gross domestic growth for this year against an earlier forecast of 4 percent.

The IMF and the Philippine government also agreed to extend the PHP6 arrangement for the rest of the year to help boost investors' and creditors' confidence especially during a volatile election year.

Gilberto U. Baltao

DISCLOSURES

JOSEPH YU Tio and Regina Rivera were elected independent directors of Regina Gold Holdings Corp.

***

LORENZO Shipping Corp. denied having any information to explain the 20-percent rise in its share price from PC 11 to PC 13.

***

PHILCORELL Corp. ceded its over 200 million shares of Lilua Properties Holdings Inc. to Development Bank of the Philippines as settlement of its P80.0 million loan to the bank.

***

SSS (Bigas) Properties Inc. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on April 27.

***

MANILA Jockey Club Inc. declared a 15-percent stock dividend in favor of stockholders of record as of Feb. 6 and will be payable on March 2.

***

SEABLANC Inc. disclosed the resignation of Marcelo Ely as corporate secretary. Elected to replace him was Samuel Torres. Eduardo Lopez Jr. and Rosemarie Barbosa Sr. resigned as independent directors. Both appointed as regular directors of the company. Armando Medina was elected chair of the audit committee.

***

UNION Bank of the Philippines announced the appointment of Gilberto Duavit as director.

***

WESTMINS Mining Company Inc. moved its annual stockholders' meeting from Feb. 5 to 6 p.m. to March 25, 6 p.m.

***

FORTUNE Cement Corp. will hold its special stockholders' meeting on Feb. 26, 9 a.m. at the 'SM' of PICC in Roxas Boulevard City.

***

MANILA Electric Company will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on May 25. Compiled by Marilar C. Salazar, PDI Research

Currencies

January 26, 2004 (Sunday)	Unit	Cash Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.1784	1.00000	55.7300
Japan	Yen	0.0016	0.00897	0.5000
United Kingdom	Pound	1.0000	5.60471	312.3000
Hongkong	Dollar	0.0230	0.12875	7.1750
Switzerland	Franc	0.1400	0.78453	43.7200
Canada	Dollar	0.1385	0.77617	43.2500
Singapore	Dollar	0.1049	0.58800	32.7700
Australia	Dollar	0.1410	0.79035	44.0500
Taiwan	Dollar	0.0053	0.02969	1.6550
Korea	Won	0.0001	0.00538	0.2997
Saudi Arabia	Riyal	0.0476	0.26667	14.8600
Kuwait	Dinar	0.6098	3.41667	190.3500
Bahrain	Dinar	0.4734	2.65217	147.7700
Thailand	Baht	0.0046	0.02577	1.4360
Qatar	Riyal	0.0490	0.27451	15.2950
Oman	Rial	0.4636	2.59740	144.7300
Argentina	Peso	0.0615	0.34454	
India	Rupee	0.0039	0.02185	0.1217
Denmark	Krone	0.2401	1.34454	74.9200
Norway	Krone	0.2400	1.34454	74.9200
Sweden	Krona	0.2100	1.17647	65.5500
Euro	Euro	0.2200	1.23249	68.6700
Brazil	Real	0.0615	0.34454	19.2000
Mexico	Peso	0.0165	0.09244	5.1500
New Peso	Peso	0.0180	0.10084	5.6180
New Zealand	Dollar	0.1000	0.56022	31.2100
Russia	Ruble	0.0061	0.03417	1.9040
Czech Republic	Koruna	0.0066	0.03697	2.0600
South Africa	Rand	0.0270	0.15126	8.4280
Iceland	Krona	0.0026	0.01457	0.8120
Slovakia	Koruna	0.0054	0.03025	1.6850
Turkey	Lira	0.0000	0.00000	0.0000
Slovenia	Tolar	0.0010	0.00560	0.3120
Lithuania	Litas	0.0000	0.00000	0.0000
Estonia	Kroon	0.0000	0.00000	0.0000

The planet of the apes

MR. BEARBULL

Ron Nathoo

THE ABOVE title reflects that the Chinese are celebrating the Year of the Monkey which will dragon for several days. Turnover is down to a third of what it was last week, so clearly foreign brokers are not using gorilla marketing.

I almost did not write this week because my head has that Asian flu. It was up all night, cooking and I could not cook. I operated a window and to flow virus. It is easy to tell when someone has bird flu. They develop a cough and a fever, get bad tempered and use foul language.

* * *

Lawyer to PEJ: "Sir, I have some bad news and some not-for-you news."

"Okay, give me the bad news."

"The Supreme Court has ruled that you are an American citizen."

"Well, what is the terrible news?"

"In view of your fighting ability, President Bush is sending you to Iraq."

* * *

DON'T you think it a strange coincidence that three spacecraft have landed on Mars in early two weeks? The first one, the Beagle, failed to report. It should have been named the Angel. Then Spirit landed and sent signals for a while, but stopped because it was on an incline and not stabilized in wind messages. Fortunately, Opportunity landed and gave it a spin bowl. Spending billions of dollars to see NOBODY's President Bush is planning a full-scale invasion of the planet and he will plant it with great vengeance. Still, intelligence, SIH and Chinese intelligence, AMOY, have evidence that the Martians have weapons of mass destruction. They are going to blow up all the discotheques in town, and all the teenagers in Binondo.

* * *

I see that one travel agency is advertising Hong Kong, Cannes, and Shenzhen for only $66. Good luck to anybody who goes, and please tell me about it. If you survive. I was born in the Year of the Snake, which is why my pants are spandrels. I am Capricorn, born under the planet Saturn; Michael Jackson is under the planet Uranus.

* * *

All the stock market is so quiet that you can hear a heart tick. I will write about the British Parliamentary system (which we have had since about 1,268) and also about our electoral system. The United Kingdom is divided into 659 homogays and each one usually has three candidates, one from each party.

The Labor Party, which currently enjoys a huge majority, used to be on Left Wing that it was practically indistinguishable from the Communist Party. At the Annual Conference, they would sing the Russian national anthem and call each other comrade, until Margaret Thatcher became Conservative Prime Minister for a record three terms, and destroyed their ideology. Now, they represent the working class, but are only slightly left of center and have abandoned their policies of nationalization and equality in order.

The Conservatives represent business and are right wing, so I suppose they could be likened to the Republicans as they gave most of the tax cuts to the rich. They too, have seen the light and are now only slightly left of center and have abandoned their policies of nationalization. Unfortunately, they have been unable to rally behind their leader and have recently dumped him.

The Liberals represent the center party, but they have been out of power for so long that I cannot now remember them being in office. However, they introduced free medicine and free education and no other party has ever dared to change those policies. They poll about 20 percent of the votes, but as the electorate tends to be polarized, either Labor or Conservative, they often get fewer seats, coming in second. At the last election, they put up a brave showing but still have less than 10 percent of the seats.

In the next election, I think they will get a number of Labor seats over Tony Blair's unpopular for dragging the UK into the war on Dhimi evidence that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. In fact, he is fighting for survival as Prime Minister as he wants to join the European currency even though opinion polls show that 70 percent of the people are against it. His Chancellor is much less loyal and a challenging him for his position. Tony Blair promised that there would be a referendum but now he is saying that if conditions are right, he will join without one. This, he might be able to do, because of his huge majority. I will not say which side I am on, merely that I don't want to see the Bank of England run by a bunch of Hotelicrats.

Unlike the UK and the Philippines, we do not vote for personalities. They are almost irrelevant. Margaret Thatcher was a true conservative candidate, devoid of charisma, but she held office for a record period and was one of the best Prime Ministers we ever had. Each party produces a detailed manifesto of its policies on education, national health, defense, security, taxation, welfare, etc. These manifestos are carefully prepared and pushed under the door of every home, as there are three to be studied. After careful consideration, we vote for the party that comes closest to our expectations. We do not care if the candidate is male or female, homosexual or ugly or whether they have a string of degrees or dropped out of school. We trust the parties to pick suitable candidates and rarely even see for the politics they represent.

The election is always a foregone conclusion. On the night that accompanies American elections, it lasts only three weeks during which all three parties are allowed to present daily a 15-minute documentary on their achievements or intentions. The Liberals only get two or three slots, as they are a minority party. There are lively debates on TV and the best speakers of all parties put intelligently, and there are also stooges in the house hall that free people around. The stooges are nearly all controlled by the Conservatives but this does not seem to influence the results. There is complete separation of Church and State, and no religious body would dream of trying to tell people how to vote.

Voting is carried out in schools and the polls close at 6 p.m. By 6 p.m., the first results are already in, and by 10 p.m., we know who were said by roughly how many votes. By midnight, we know almost exactly what the final figures will be. The war in 1940, when everything was done by hand, I expect we now use computers so maybe it is even faster.

There is no such thing as buying votes and the idea is laughable. There are very few poor people, thanks to our welfare system, a buoyant economy and low unemployment. The old, the sick, and the unemployed are all well taken cared of, and immigrants have exactly the same rights as Britons. They can buy houses, own businesses 100 percent, and get free medical treatment and education for their children. If readers are interested, I will write next week about our parliamentary system, which is far superior to the bicameral system in the US. And also about our beautiful Scottish, which are among the best in the world. Why am I here? Because I am married to a Filipina and I love this country, particularly the way people take care of their parents and old folk. ronbearbull@hotmail.com/

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GSMI income bits P1.6B

GENERAL San Miguel Inc., the beer liquor unit of San Miguel Corp., posted a net income of P1.66 billion in 2003, or about the same as the previous year's level.

In a statement issued yesterday, GSMI said its net sales revenues expanded by 4 percent last year on the back of an 886-percent increase in exports. A total of 887,000 cases of liquor were exported in 2003, up from 90,000 cases in 2002.

Consolidated sales volume rose to 31.7 million cases last year from 29.4 million cases in 2002, while net sales revenue went up to P12 billion from P11.4 billion.

"GSMI posted higher sales volume on account to export volume in the third and fourth quarters of 2003 and a steady growth in local sales volume despite the difficult business conditions that affected Ginebra San Miguel sales in the last three quarters," the company said.

The company's operating income in the same year was P27 billion.

GSMI said its liquor operations in southern Philippines improved significantly following the strong performance of its Vino Kulafu brand and a reduction in its fixed costs.

Sales of Vino Kulafu grew 33 percent year-on-year on improved distribution, aggressive advertisement and promotion, and higher beer income.

Sales in northern Philippines grew steadily, boosted by the strong performance of the GSM Strauss and Prospero. — Doris C. Dumlao

$712-M LOAN PACKAGE

ADB warns of fiscal crisis in RP

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE Asian Development Bank (ADB) yesterday warned that the Philippines faces a possible fiscal crisis over its budget deficits, as it unveiled a $712 million three-year lending program for the country.

The loan package is intended for the country's poverty reduction and human development programs over the next three years.

Commenting on the country's huge budget deficit, ADB country director Thomas Counch said that while the Philippines was not in a crisis, because it was able to roll over its debts and continue accessing the international capital markets, it could find itself in that situation unless corrective measures were taken soon.

"When it's truly unsustainable, it will have its access to the international capital markets," Counch told reporters in a briefing on the bank's country strategy and program for 2004-2006.

ADB Southeast Asia officer-in-charge Mumtchil Akhtar said the ADB board was also concerned over the "delay in the projected turnaround of the fiscal deficit."

Counch said that although the Philippines, the biggest sovereign issuer in Asia next only to Japan, was still able to get funds overseas, it might have to pay a higher price for new borrowings. Spreads on Philippine debt papers have widened in view of a credit rating downgrade by Moody's Investor Service.

Counch said the Philippine Congress would have to act on crucial revenue-boosting measures such as the reorganization of the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the imposition of "sin" taxes.

In the meantime, the newly approved ADB lending facility for the Philippines focuses on health, education, water, microfinance, small and medium enterprises, irrigation, agrarian reform, energy, transport, environment and governance.

For 2004 alone, the $201 million loan was earmarked for eight projects. ADB chief country officer Nahaid Ghalib said the bank hoped to disburse the entire amount during the period covered. Records, however, show that only about $200-$250 million was being absorbed by the country yearly.

Actual lending levels depend on the government's budget situation, the country's absorptive capacity and progress in policy reforms, as well as implementation of ADB's other projects in the country.

"The lending pipeline for the next three years has been designed with some flexibility to take into account emerging priorities that may arise after the May 2004 elections," Counch said.

The Philippines is ADB's fifth largest borrower, accounting for 8 percent of cumulative lending, but poor implementation have resulted to lower disbursement levels in recent years with a report from SFF

Insular Life's dollar investment plan relaunched

DUBLIN: Life has re-launched one of its best-selling products, the Dollar Earner, a US dollar-denominated endowment policy that also provides an investor insurance.

Insular Life president and CEO Mayo Jose D. Ongpin said the rising demand for dollar-denominated investments had continued to expand the market for the single pay 10-year dollar endowment, thus, the decision to offer anew the Dollar Earner.

"Insular Life recognizes the need for a viable dollar-denominated investment instrument for those who want higher returns for their hard-earned dollars. Dollar Earner was a hit when we offered it last year because of its remarkable returns. It combines the benefits of life insurance protection, savings in the form of an endowment at the end of 10 years, and attractive investment yields. It is ideal for the country's dollar earners as well as those who want a secure alternative investment instrument that would provide attractive returns," Ongpin said.

Nobby J. Tesoro Jr., Insular Life's vice president for Business Development adds, "The life insurance coverage for the years after additional financial security to both the investor and the investor's dependents." Tesoro further illustrates how the plan works. "For a minimum single investment of about $1,500, a 30-year old can have $2,000 life insurance coverage for 10 years. At the end of 10 years, the investor receives $1,000 as maturity benefit, which translates to a higher return compared to what it would have earned in a time deposit or savings deposit. The returns will be higher for higher coverage. For the same age, a single investment of about $6,500 guarantees a maturity benefit of $10,000, which translates to twice the rate of return of the $1,500 investment.

DA mass-produces strawberry seedlings

BAGUIO CITY — The Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Plant Industry have stressed that the production of strawberry seedlings in laboratories is meet the increasing demand for the seasonal fruit and to boost the local strawberry industry.

Elizabeth Woods, assistant Cordillera director of DA, said their laboratories, since 2000, have been producing seedlings of varieties imported from Japan and Australia. But Woods said the seedlings have yet to be distributed as the DA is still conducting tests on the appropriate nursery for Benguet.

Mayor Nestor Nagpaay of La Trinidad, Benguet, the major producer of strawberries in Benguet, said farmers in his town are members of seedlings from Argentina.

Nagpaay said local farmers used to buy seedlings from Papua Berna, whose seedlings came from California.

He said there is an abundant supply of strawberries this month as this is the peak of the harvest season. Fruit a high of P150 a kilogram in November, strawberries are now sold for P50 to P60 a kilogram. — Desiree Cuhara, PIA Northern Luzon bureau

Peso plunges . . .

From page B1

raised its overnight rates or the banks' reserve requirement to prop up the peso.

Instead of using economic tools, the BSP chief said the government must restore its "solidarity in the political front" to avert any further damage to the local currency.

"We have to gain back the confidence of investors. Hopefully, the situation would not worsen anymore. But that another factor that would [be the expected rate watch downgrade of Moody's," said the central bank governor.

JGH, he said the central bank would continue to monitor closely the foreign exchange transactions of banks to ensure that they have not been violating any policy.

"The BSP intervention would depend on the situation," he said. If the negative sentiment is increasing, then it would be better for us to stay away from the market. We should not waste our bullets," said a monetary official.

Fitness LIFESTYLE

Editor Cielo Banal-Formoso

When your muscles say 'Ouch'. . .

WELL AND GOOD

Tessa Anama

A FEW weeks ago, my father sent me an e-mail titled "8 Week at the Gym", which humorously described the aches and pains experienced by a fictional couch potato after he started exercising. Here is the shortened, edited version:

"Dear Diary,

"For my 40th birthday this year, my wife purchased a week of personal training at the local health club for me. Although I am still in great shape since playing with my college football team 20 years ago, I decided it would be a good idea to go ahead and give it a try. Called the club and made my reservations with a personal trainer named Belinda.

"**Monday:** Started my day at 6 a.m. Belinda gave me a test and showed me the machines. She was very encouraging as I did my sit-ups, although my gut area already sobbing from holding it in the whole time she was around. This is going to be a fantastic week!

"**Tuesday:** Climb a whole pot of coffee, but I finally made it out the door. Belinda made me sit on a back machine and a barely-visible strap ran across the six—then she put weights on it! My legs were a little wobbly on the treadmill, but I made the full mile. Belinda's reassuring smile made it all worthwhile. I feel great! It's a whole new life for me.

"**Wednesday:** The only way I can touch my toes is by laying the toothbrush on the counter and moving my mouth back and forth over it. I believe I have an hernia in both pectorals. Driving was okay as long as I didn't try to start or stop. Belinda was impatient with me, thinking that my screams bothered other club members.

"**Thursday:** Belinda was waiting for me with her vampire like teeth exposed as her thin, evil lips were pulled back in a full snarl. I couldn't help being half in love late. It took me that long to tie my shoes. Belinda took me in with various contraptions. When I was not looking, I ran and hid in the men's room.

"**Friday:** I hate Belinda more than any human being has ever hated any other human being in the history of the world. If there was a part of my body I could move without unbearable pain, I would beat her with it.

"**Saturday:** Belinda left a message on my answering machine wondering why I did not show up today. Just hearing her voice made me want to smash the machine with my phaser. However, I lacked the strength to even use the

I'll remain and ended up catching 11 straight hours of the Weather Channel.

"**Sunday:** I'm leaving the church one pick me up for services today as I can go and thank God that this week is over. I will also pray that next year, my wife will choose a gift for me that is less—like a root canal or a mammogram."

Real-life experience

As funny as this story is, it is unfortunately the real-life experience of many months exercise who feel like they were run over by a truck a day or two after exercise. The experience can be so traumatic they do not attempt to work out again for many years. Sometimes, even just the memory of the pain prevents them from ever exercising again.

Muscle soreness can mean different things to different people. To some veteran exercisers, muscle soreness is exasperated, to some strange masochistic way, as "proof" that the exercise is effective.

This is not correct, of course, because muscle soreness simply means your muscles are not used to the type or intensity of whatever exercise it is you are doing. Whether the exercise is effective or not for your desired goal is another story.

Muscle pain that appears 12-48 hours after exercise is technically called "delayed onset muscle soreness" or DOMS. It is not the same as "immediate muscle soreness", which is temporary muscle fatigue or the "burn" that you feel while doing the exercise.

Immediate muscle soreness goes away as soon as you rest for a little while, but DOMS sneaks up on you with a vengeance a day or two later. The pain can be as mild as a general soreness all achy feeling or it can be so severe that even the smallest movements like brushing your teeth can make you scream.

Even fit people can get sore muscles. Muscle soreness usually happens when you try a new kind of exercise, when you increase the intensity of an old exercise or when you go back to a familiar workout after having stopped for a long time.

In other words, it doesn't just happen to unfit people. It also happens when a fit person does something his her body is not accustomed to.

For example, if a runner were to do a yoga class, he would most likely experience sore muscles. It doesn't mean the runner is not fit. He just isn't used to yoga. On the other hand, a strong and flexible yogi will be sore the day after doing an hour's run for the first time.

It is unrealistic to expect absolutely no muscle soreness every time you try something new, but you can keep the soreness to a minimum by making conservative increases in the frequency, duration or intensity.

If starting a group exercise class, choose the beginner version. Many people get "deadly" muscle soreness (the type where they cannot get out of bed the next day) with kickboxing, yoga or Pilates because they jump right into advance classes.

If you have never lifted weights before, start with light poundages and do only one set of each exercise per muscle group. It is what you do "not much, not soon, not far" that delayed muscle soreness occurs.

Causes of muscle soreness

There have been many theories about why delayed muscle soreness occurs. The most widely accepted theory to date is that it is caused by microscopic tears either in the muscle tissue itself or the connective tissue that surrounds the muscle. Similar to the white stretchy-looking stuff that surrounds and interweaves a piece of beef or pork.

EXERCISE OF THE WEEK

Praying mantis on stability ball

THIS advance exercise strengthens the trunk muscles (abdominals and lower back) as well as the sides of the upper back and shoulders.

Equipment:

Stability ball and exercise mat. As a substitute, you can use a sturdy chair with robust. Caution: the chair 12-18 inches away from a wall so that when you roll forward never of it, the chair will be held steady by the wall.

Exercise technique:

1. Kneel down behind the ball and place your fists on top.

2. Roll the ball forward as you simultaneously lean forward and place your body weight on top of the ball. You will be supported by your forearms.

3. Hold for five to 10 seconds.

4. Return to the start leg position by contracting the muscles at the sides of your upper back and pulling your arms backward to roll the ball toward you.

Performance tips:

1. Pull your belly button toward your spine to keep your weight from your head to your knees. Don't allow your spine to sag downward.

2. Make sure to keep breathing as you hold the position.

3. Pull up and away from your shoulders. Don't allow yourself to sink into your shoulders.

Repetitions:

Three to five repetitions.

THE GANG: Tim Jimenez, Louie and Mollie Ribbeck, Lot'jo Sequia and Maribel Sequia

HARK-DE Prince Lorelei, Raul Manzano and Kenia Heckstein's Angeles

SWEET and Nene Quisumbing, Maly and Minnie Perlas

Elegant dinner for turning a brilliant 71

BIRTHDAY magnate and world-renowned Relucian Pulay Heckstein with his wife, birthday celebrator Maly Concepcion Heckstein

One of Cosme Macalino's ultimate party hostesses, Maly Heckstein, just turned a brilliant 71, dahlings.

For the five select dinners who were fad to attend any of the herbaceous social events, the elegant dinner host all the clankings of a party on "typically Maly." For one, palangan, Maly wouldn't take no for an answer and succeeded in getting the Tower Club to open its Chinese restaurant even on a holiday.

The restaurant was decorated with Heckstein's beautiful floral arrangements, but the piece de resistance was a huge birthday cake from Manner in "Maly's colors," which are chartreuse, gold, and melon. It was topped with fondant icing shaped into a lifesize birthday girl figurine! To those who know Maly well, it's no surprise at all as she and her daughters are well known for their penchant

for sexpot handbags and shoes.

With the help of hostess pal Bien Gonzalez-Garcia (who was on a beach in Tahanan at the time, the Tower Club took on a romance and sexy slippers atmosphere. Each table glimmered with crackle in gold and silver of different sizes. Diners across all sate the table shimmered in the candlelight. See is he outdoor was the excellent Caravan Chinese restaurant, lovely chosen by Maly herself and daughter, vivaciously has Simone

WITHOUT BATTING AN EYELASH

Maverick Arnaiche

Photos by Alex Van Hagen and Rodolfo Blas

H. Staples that made everyone feel glad they skipped lunch.

Traditional giveaway

There were, of course, Maly's special giveaway fruit cakes that had been in many Heckstein wedding or birthday.

Our hosts's table accorded some in full glamorous force: palangans, like hostess namesakes Maly Concepcion, 81, and Madeleine Lim; dashing Mary Pruno and her daughter Martina Levine; brilliant Pinto-Gutierrez sisters Mae Manzano and widow Merry Tantoco; Boling Reyes; Jerry and Vicky Cuisia; Irving Pontanosa; and Mandy and Zita Wilkinson.

At another table were some who belonged to the privileged arena of real glamour: super eligible bachelor Arnou Barua; Brad and Bobo Girl Bricks; Armando and Marivic Vergara Prado, Minnie Ferreiera; Montary Bond and her stunning Miss dergen, encrusted real'd jewelry, vibrant Nene Quisumbing, coco low, new high-profile Judy Anaisma Roxas steps couples Dr. Bernie and Sheng Gregorio.

"Zita Yap, do you want to look well?" Johnny Litton and admirable wife Rose Rollins; Oscar and Celinda Lopez; Bernie and Marsha Concepcion; Raoul and Sheila Delgado; Susan Concepcion; Monsignor Pol Lim and Luling Lim, with sister Bobbie Gan-Ayerdi; LOLO Segura; Mel and Linda Alonzo; Paul and Nita Rosario; Pura and Vicky Delgado; glam girl of the night Vicky Fernandez and her husband, popular Bohemian Jun Jun Zobel's Bella Someone. Nimmo Ancheta Bimbaoy, plus so many others not quite like them, but who belonged to the same old name-old wealth club, palangan.

After the fab dinner, Maly was called to blow out another breath. Not your time but surrounded with handling birthday cake, surrounded by her husband Pajay, and children Bunny with hubby well-liked Ed Segovia, only son Buffy with his wife, Southern belle Gina Gabaldon; workhorse is Bubsie and husband business man Manet Posadas and youngest daughter Blaina.

Needless to say, the six-six lasted left the Tower Club that night with another beautiful memory of a simple, yet elegant evening celebrating the past 71 years of Maly (the hostess with the mostest who always dares to be different!

Cheers, palangan!

Young sensation is back

Singer, swinger, dreamboat of ladies who make the young and not so young swoon, handsome Angelo Cayanan, Canadian crooner Michael Dahli is back in town! He sells-off unsuspecting lovers and all just abominator of standard music, palangan.

Michael holds women and men around Manila last September 2003 with his sold-out concert at the PICC. Well his super hot eight-boy band, he had women and men applauding and crooning to old school tunes.

Yeah Michael's still rich of all, from going double-gold here in the Philippines and the USA, three platinum in Canada and in Australia, the young singing sensation has nowhere to go but up! He was discovered by fellow singer Sheryl Reaves and hooked by another musical legend, Paul Anka.

As part of his Asian tour, the smooth swinger will be in town Friday, Jan. 30. Tickets on his one night only concert are disappearing so fast you better grab them while you can, dahlings, at Tickets world outlets in Fullerton Bookstores, tel. 9975682, 8919999, or 0917-7917546, 0920-5859000, 0915-4766700, 0927-2653682, 0919-6327841.

And for all you Cebuanos, this is a treat, dont go to pechet tissues at the Isla, cebuano. Hometown friend in Cebu City on Saturday Jan. 31, Michael will definitely send your hearts, palangan.

HOTSHOTS: George and Suzanne Ang, president of New York Life Insurance

WELL-RESPECTED: Couple Felix and Tessie Amparo

CLOSE pals from way back, Mary Pruno and Raul Concepcion

ENJOY and Sara Ortigas

KATRINA Arce and Marbella Suarez

CESAR Barrera with Dolla and Della Yap

CD Angeles

JIMMY Lapa

JOEY Cuisia

THE CELEBRATOR with star-sister sisters Cynthia and Ray Monserrat

MR. DREAMBOAT Michael Bublé is back in town to melt our hearts again.

Principles of Psychometry

(Part 2)

"THE MANUAL of Psychometry," which Joseph Rhodes Buchanan wrote in 1800, was full of statistics and rather boring. It was of interest only to scholars and researchers. Fortunately another scientist got interested in it and wrote a more interesting book about the subject. He was William Denton, a geologist.

Denton discovered psychometry quite by accident. He came home one day from fieldwork and showed his wife a specimen he had found. So his wife held the mysterious object in her hand, she had clear visions of a large animal, so big as an elephant, with flash skin, that lived in swamps and ate only vegetables and fruits.

When the object he brought home to show his wife was one found, it turned out to be a fossilized tooth of a mastodon, an extinct animal as big as an elephant, with flash hide, lived in swamps and was a vegetarian.

Impressed with what his wife could do, Denton was encouraged to bring home specimens of other specimens in his wife to be read or described. In all cases her reading proved to be highly accurate. Later, he discovered that his wife's sisters could do the same. It was then he discovered Buchanan's book in he searched for an explanation.

After years of experimentation with his wife, and later with other people, Denton discovered that many people, given some brief training, could perform psychometric readings of objects. He wrote an interesting book about the subject, "The Soul of Things," where he described in detail his observations. It was published in the late 1800s.

Some of the principles Denton discovered are as follows:

1. If several persons hold an object, the first to hold it would be read first before the others. This is known as the Principle of Primary Impression.

2. If, however, a person had strong positive or negative sensations, there would be read first even if he held the object last.

A kitchen knife used only to cut vegetables and peel fruits will not have strong vibes attached to it. But if that same knife, for example, is used to kill somebody with hatred and anger, that knife acquires a different character. A good psychometric reader can describe exactly how the knife was used and the person who held it.

Denton also studied what there were people who were so sensitive to certain chemicals that their body would react to them even if not held directly. During the Pilot World War, he observed soldiers holding scented bottle of cologne sensing loud or enemy would develop symptoms of either loud or nervous poisoning.

INNER AWARENESS

Jaime T. Licaros

Akashic record

To understand how psychometry works, we must first explain the concept of the akashic record. This comes from the Sanskrit for Indian word "akasha" which is roughly translated as "time-space" in English.

But this does not give the full meaning of this word. It has no equivalent in the English language. The nearest definition I saw of the word akasha is this: "It was contains the entire stuff of the universe into their smallest, most basic components, what will be left is the akasha." In other words, the akasha is the sub-atomic of all matter. It is even more basic or fundamental than what Western physicists call the "quantum" level of matter.

Everything that transpires on earth, every thought, feeling or action we have experienced is recorded in the "akasha." Thus, it is called the akashic record. Each of us creates our own akashic record at the time of our birth, ending at the time of our death. This record is permanent and cannot be erased, edited or modified even a bit.

The Christian religion seems to have a concept of the akashic record because it teaches that, when a person dies, he /she will open a "Book of Life" containing every deed or thought of the newly departed. Based on what the record contains, the person goes either to heaven or hell. There is actually no book in heaven, as it is only a state of being and not a place. What the Christian theologian must be referring to is the akashic record of every individual soul.

When we hold an object, we leave something of ourselves in that object. This is not on a physical but energy level. Therefore, when we try to read or feel an object, we are actually trying to tune into the akashic record of that object.

What gives power to a will-gimmicks is its akashic record. A fetish may or may not have any will life or love holdover an objects' held. That's why personal possessions of Jesus Christ and of saints are much sought after by their disciples or followers.

By the same token, objects can be found to negative emotions when held by negative or evil persons can give negative influences on a place or person. That's why antiques of unknown origin should never be brought to one's home because they can give bad luck or bad vibes. Think of personal objects belonging to people like Hitler, Charles Manson and serial killers.

We should, therefore, be careful about things we hold or buy especially second hand items. We can never tell who has held or owned those objects.

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Health trivia you should mind

Be master of mind rather than mastered by mind.—Zen saying

THE MIND plays many tricks on you and has the power to influence your health, mood and eventually the course of your life. If you let it.

Trust, you should adopt a daily exercise that will ensure a calm and centered disposition, a mind not influenced by negative thoughts fed by fear.

'A meditation good for everyone' We. It is the art of embracing silence, keeping very still for at least 10 minutes in the morning and before bedtime can and will regulate your breathing, put you in a state of calm and ensure mental and emotional well-being.

It's quiet room, sit comfortably, close eyes and legs uncrossed. Focus on your breathing as you close your mind and look at an imaginary bedroom. There some soothing music if it will help.

You will get better and easily reach your quiet core with more practice. Meditation brings you to the point of inspiration, so that problems melt away and only stillness remains.

How can I keep the vitamins in my food? Not all the food you eat have the vitamins you are supposed to get. If food is unhealthful, you will not get the nutrients it contains. Here are some tips to avoid that:

• Don't wash vegetables in preserve Vitamins B and C. Simply scrub or brush.

• Blend fruits and vegetables into their vitamins. Making your own fresh salad is best instead of buying sliced veggies that are ready-to-cook.

• When preparing veggies, use a steamer. Braised veggies lose their Vitamins A and C.

• Eat frozen green beans rather than those you left to thaw in the refrigerator for a week. Frozen beans retain their vitamins better than defrosted ones.

• There are more vitamins in the greenest, outer leaves of lettuce, so go for those parts.

• Broccoli leaves have higher Vitamin A content than the stalks and flower buds.

• Beef or brown rice is healthier for you than white rice.

• Stainless steel, glass and enamel food containers are best if you'd like to cook in containers.

INSIDE OUT

Gary Quintos

Is drinking alcohol safe? Alcohol is considered to be the most widely used drug in society today. And because it is so readily available, most people do not regard it as a drug.

But alcohol is a drug and, if misused and abused, can cause grave damage to your body.

Alcohol is a sedative-depressant and not a stimulant. It affects the central nervous system. It can rupture your veins, destroy brain cells, cause ulcers and affect the liver's ability to process fat.

Just five drinks a day can cause organ damage. It will deplete the body of Vitamins C, B1, B2, B6, B12, folic acid, Vitamin E, zinc, magnesium and potassium.

It doesn't matter if the alcohol content of beer is four percent, wine 12 percent and whiskey or brandy 50 percent, because they all have the same potential to intoxicate. Thus, you are wrong to feel safe about having seven cans of beer instead of seven shots of brandy. You can get just as drunk.

There are vitamins you can take to decrease your taste for alcohol. With the right diet, heavy drinkers can quit the habit.

Dr. H.L. Newbold of New York, who has been working with alcoholics, prescribes five glutamine capsules of 200 mg each (not glutamic acid) three times daily to control drinking.

To reduce hangovers, take the Chinese herb kudzu (it has been used for thousands of years to treat intoxication)—500 mg capsules three times daily should ease your hangover if you take it before and after drinking. It contains two phytochemicals, daidzin and daidzein, which can successfully reduce blood alcohol levels.

A high-protein diet plus Vitamins A, C, E, B and all B vitamins are helpful, too.

How can I quit my cocaine habit? Cocaine causes depression, fatigue and irritability. Tyrosine, an amino acid found in meat and wheat, helps overcome cocaine withdrawal symptoms. Also helpful are Vitamins C, B and tyrosine hydrochloride, as well as a tablet of St. John's Wort polyphenol.

Did you know that the wrong "fat" in cocaine can kill? The fatter I love much you pay, more only get 60 per cent pure cocaine. The test for the "fat", used by dealers to dilute the drug.

There are tests that are harmless, like herpes, dentrose, mannose and mannitol. But aromatosis, calcium granules, liver and hemorrhoids can be dangerous. They are insoluble and can clog up parts of the body.

Cocaine causes dependence because you need more to recapture your high. Its side effects are sweating, rapid heartbeat, cold sweats, appetite loss, vomiting, convulsions and anaphylactic shock (extreme allergic reaction) and death, it is lethal.

If you have a drug dependency problem you should quit right away. Users can take choline (calcium 1000 mg) or magnesium (250 mg) two times daily to help relax.

Beta-keen, an herb, is taken for swollen sleep. Vitamin C, 500 mg, 10 times a day, 1,000 mg Vitamin B complex, 100 mg, one to three times daily also, get counseling. Call New Beginnings at 7722122 or 8094078 and look for Dindo Ayuste.

I am a happily married 56-year-old woman. Not for sex drive is almost zero. What are the natural ways to revive it? Can I give my husband the same?

As senior life, coupled with exercise and the right diet, is needed for success. Add lemon zest (with its plant estrogen). Have your DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone, a natural hormone that decreases as we age) levels checked. When you may take 25 mg DHEA and the herb damiana, a natural aphrodisiac. Ginseng three times a day for males and you could use gingseng first.

Your husband may want to take sustacontrol, a natural food substance found in alfalfa, lemon, wheat germ and vegetable oils. It takes four to six weeks before it takes effect.

Always remember that a diet rich in raw or lightly cooked foods rich in vitamin B and amino acids is essential to a healthy libido. This, plus a romantic candlelight dinner should do the trick!

Love and light!

Reference: "Vitamin Bible for the 21st Century" by Earl Mindell

HYPE INSIDE
THE a* Superstar Libro, Adidas' most technologically advanced basketball shoes, are here. The shoes provide more power for getting off the ground and better cushioning when landing. Those are the choice of Tim Duncan, the two-time Most Valuable Player of the National Basketball Association.

When your muscles say 'Ouch'. . .

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This is actually a natural response to exercise, and the body adapts by becoming stronger.

As for immediate muscle soreness, scientists believe it is caused when microscopic tears, and a chemical by-product associated with muscle contraction, "irritates" the nerves.

Treating muscle soreness. There have been many experiments to determine the best method of treating delayed muscle soreness.

Studies have been done using ice, massage, stretching, anti-inflammatory drugs and muscle pain lotions. There is still not one conclusive method that has really been proven to treat the condition, though some of the methods mentioned or a combination of the methods can help alleviate the intensity of the soreness so you don't suffer so much.

Add on its own, muscle soreness goes away in three to seven days.

Many people also wonder if they can exercise when their muscles are sore. If you have muscle soreness, the answer is yes, but keep the intensity light. If your muscle soreness is severe, lay off exercise for a few days.

Biological-ly "bad" pain, from muscle soreness, is little delayed muscle soreness is not the same as pain in your joints or pain in your muscles that increasingly gets worse. For your own safety, you should follow the distinction between the two.

First, you should feel the effort in your muscles but never in your joints. If your joints are aching, there is something wrong in the way you are doing the exercise or it is not an appropriate exercise for you. Second, if the muscle soreness persists after seven days or seems to be getting worse, there is something wrong and you should go see a sports medicine or orthopedic doctor.

Muscle soreness taken to the extreme. When muscle soreness is taken to the extreme, it can result in a rare but incredibly serious condition known as "exertional rhabdomyolysis" or ER.

In this month's issue of "Men Health & Fitness Insider", Dr. Ralph La Verge explains that ER is a condition "in which muscle fibers break down in response to exertion and release their breakdown products into the circulation."

The writer, "Marksmen exercise can be triggered by endurance events—triathlons, marathons and basic military training...or by other exercise for which the participant is not well adapted to this example, extensive resistance training)."

He warns that extreme cases of ER can cause kidney failure and, in some cases, death.

Muscle pain, weakness, fever, nausea and vomiting are all symptoms of ER, according to La Verge. But the first clue, he says, is usually dark brown colored urine.

If you experience these symptoms, seek immediate medical treatment, which may include "hydration, diuretics, electrolyte correction, dialysis and other supportive therapy."

Visit www.imagazine@hmm.com

REAL ESTATE

City living at its best

Text and photos by Charlie T. Bulan

LIVING stylishly in the city would sometimes mean staying either in posh villages or mediocre and high-rise condominiums.

Montgomery Place is different.

A high-end, low-density development, Montgomery Place is a community of townhouses inspired by the gracious American South architectural design—high-pitched roofs, tall ceilings, panoramic windows—that promises to let occupants an expansive feeling that is not hard pressed to find in the city.

Says Ayala Land Inc. division manager Jose Juan Aguirre, "It's the city gives out that cluttered feeling... not here at Montgomery Place. In fact, some of our two- and three-bedroom homes feature pocket gardens or front porches and with proper planning, one even has the option to take advantage of the expansion area in the future."

Convenient location

Situated in a 7.1-hectare lot on E. Rodriguez Sr. Avenue (near Trinity College and St. Luke's Medical Center), Montgomery Place's convenient location is just minutes away from Greenhills, Manila, Ortigas and even Makati's central business district.

Just a few minutes drive will also take you to a leading hospital, the country's oldest university, a selection of exclusive schools, and shopping and entertainment district, "sigo-adds."

The centerpiece of the community is the Townhall, a two-story clubhouse that provides common areas for relaxing and recreation.

It houses a social hall, function rooms for parties, a pool with playground equipment, and adult and children's pool.

"With the completion of our second phase, we will add pocket park and a riverside park along the San Juan river that bounds this community in the northwest," relates Aguirre.

HIGH-PITCHED roofs, tall ceilings and wide windows create an expansive feeling within this city-scaled units.

Some of the two- and three-bedroom homes feature pocket gardens or front porches and with proper planning, one even has the option to take advantage of the expansion area in the future

Attention to details

Much care and attention is given to the development of Montgomery Place like its own sewage treatment facility and underground electrical cabling are used.

Even the whole property is cleared by almost 100 meters from its perimeter ground level to assure no flooding will take place during heavy and continuous downpour.

Aguirre also adds that the community is also long shot friendly as their landed inquiries of their Chinese-Filipino residents who would like to import good luck and better life following this ancient Chinese tradition.

To maintain the beauty of this gated community is the Ayala Property Management Corp. tasked to do security and maintenance of Montgomery Place.

"Its expertise in managing residentials will ensure that Montgomery Place will remain among the city's most desired communities to live in," assures Aguirre.

Four unit models

Right now there are four unit models of three floors to choose from: Camden (1171sq. m), Riverside (146 sq. m), Harrison (172 sq. m), and Piedmont (208 sq. m.).

Prices ranges from P7 million to P12 million.

Each unit comes with lush aerial seeding, provisions for two telephone lines and cable TV, modular kitchen cabinetry, a valley gutter, and garage for two vehicles.

Ayala Land Inc. is the country's largest and most experienced real estate developer. It is the industry leader in establishing fully integrated communities renowned for ensuring that clients realize unsurpassed investment values and quality of life.

THE AYALA Property Management Corp. will ensure that this gated community will remain beautiful and secure for its residents.

THE TWO-STORY townhall serves as the centerpiece of the community.

NIGHT banks the townhall is a welcoming pool for adult and children.

Private sector builds huge infra projects, says UP study

MOST developing and even industrialized countries utilize the participation of the private sector—including customers—to finance infrastructure projects through the "user's pay" principle.

This is one of the key findings of the University of the Philippines National Engineering Research Foundation (UP Nonresearch Foundation (UP Nonresearch Foundation (UP Nonresearch